Science of Thought Group

This is a philosophical and psychological group. Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems, such as those connected with reality, existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind and even language. Our approach considers the only values which are stable and coherent, excluding all nonsense, as what we stand for must be real and proved.

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Meditation a Brain Exercise

By Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

Foreword

Since Dr. Roberto Assagioli founded psychosynthesis a lot of research in the field has been done in various parts of the world, and it has been discovered that meditation keeps the brain stronger as we age. Studies found that that the brains of people who meditate have regions that are larger than those who do not mediate and demonstrate less age-related atrophy. Long-term meditators have white-matter fibres that are either more numerous, more dense or more insulated throughout the brain, have been discovered.

It has also been found that the normal age-related decline of white-matter tissue is considerably reduced in active meditation practitioners.

Dr. Jurgen C. Luders, MD, neurosurgean in Grand Rapid, USA and her team used a new type of brain imaging system called diffusion tensor imaging. It allows scientists to see structural connectivity of regions in the brain.

Using the imaging technology on 27 active mediators and 27 control subjects, they found that the differences of brain connectivity was not confined to a single region of the brain, but included the frontal and temporal lobes, as well as the limbic structures and the brain stem.

"It is possible that actively meditating, especially over a long period of time, can induce changes on a micro-anatomical level," said Luders, who is also a meditator.

The areas that demonstrated the most structural connectivity included the corticospinal tract, where the axons travel between the cerebral cortex and the spinal cord and helps govern the body's movements.

Luders cautions that while it is tempting to draw connections between meditation and brain health, other factors should be considered as well.

"It's possible that meditators might have brains that are fundamentally different to begin with," Luders said.

"For example, a particular brain anatomy may have drawn an individual to meditation or helped maintain an ongoing practice — meaning that the enhanced fibre connectivity in meditators constitutes a predisposition towards meditation, rather than being the consequence of the practice."

Luders does maintain, however, that meditation does have its benefits.

"Meditation appears to be a powerful mental exercise with the potential to change the physical structure of the brain at large. Collecting evidence that active, frequent and regular meditation practices cause alterations of white-matter fibre tracts that are profound and sustainable may become relevant for patient populations suffering from axonal demyelization and white-matter atrophy," she claims.

In the first place the technique of meditation is in fact a non-religious system, but taking over by the religion faith world-wide firstly in Buddhism and Hinduism. Meditation is a practice in which an individual trains the mind or induces a mode of consciousness, either to realize some benefit or for the mind to simply acknowledge its content without becoming identified with that content, or as an end in itself.

The term *meditation* refers to a broad variety of practices that includes techniques designed to promote relaxation, build internal energy or life force (*qi*, *ki*, *prana*, etc.) and develop compassion, love, patience, generosity and forgiveness. A particularly ambitious form of meditation aims at effortlessly sustained single-pointed concentration meant to enable its practitioner to enjoy an indestructible sense of well-being while engaging in any life activity.

The word *meditation* carries different meanings in different contexts. Meditation has been practiced since antiquity as a component of numerous religious traditions and beliefs. Meditation often involves an internal effort to self-regulate the mind in some way. Meditation is often used to clear the mind and ease many health concerns, such as high blood pressure, depression, and anxiety. It may be done sitting, or in an active way—for instance, Buddhist monks involve awareness in their day-to-day activities as a form of mind-

training. Prayer beads or other ritual objects are commonly used during meditation in order to keep track of or remind the practitioner about some aspect of the training.

Meditation may involve generating an emotional state for the purpose of analyzing that state—such as anger, hatred, etc.—or cultivating a particular mental response to various phenomena, such as compassion. The term "meditation" can refer to the state itself, as well as to practices or techniques employed to cultivate the state. Meditation may also involve repeating a mantra and closing the eyes. The mantra is chosen based on its suitability to the individual meditator. Meditation has a calming effect and directs awareness inward until pure awareness is achieved, described as "being awake inside without being aware of anything except awareness itself." In brief, there are dozens of specific styles of meditation practice, and many different types of activity commonly referred to as meditative practices.

Psychically speaking, there are three types of people in the world. The first is the devoutly religious individual. They believe in their one religion absolutely among the many, and they'll follow that religion no matter what, even if that religion causes harm to other people as the Islamic State nowadays.

The second type of person is the strictly non-religious and non-spiritual person. These people avoid religion and spirituality. They believe religions and spirituality are for the brainwashed. This mentality helps them to avoid being consumed by any one belief. But it also prevents them from taking advantage of the positive aspects of Psychism or metaphysics, of which meditation is just one.

The third type is the wisest type. This type of person doesn't force themselves to stick to one type of religion or spirituality. They're not going to follow a book just because society tells them to. But at the same time, they're open minded enough to consider that some aspects of metaphysics or Psychism might actually be good. This type of person is open minded enough to consider aspects of spirituality, but also brave enough and independent enough to think for themselves. It is thought this is the best type of person.

It is easy to see why the third type of person is best. It is because they're not forcing themselves to believe anything and, equally important, they're not forcing themselves *not* to believe anything. They are the ones with open minds.

If you are of the third type of people, then I'm surely you'll agree with me that some reduced aspects of spirituality are pretty awesome. Take meditation, for instance. Meditation began as a religious practice. It was originally a Hindu

practice. It began in Hinduism 4000 years ago. The Buddhists then took hold of meditation and created most of the meditation techniques that are used today.

Meditation began as a religious practice. But it's changed over the past four thousand years. Today it's fully either a psychic (spiritual) and scientific health practice. The technique of meditation is for atheists as well, it is a mind working only anyway.

Whether it is stated or not, all meditation practices are based on a philosophy — some underlying understanding of the purpose of meditation, the nature of the mind and body, and the nature of life itself. Your experience in meditation will be influenced by your understanding of what meditation is about and the reason you are meditating. Above all our meditation style should be firstly based on trust in life and trust in ourselves. Increase in trust brings deep relaxation and peace. The benefits people feel from these meditations is a reflection of the increased ability to relax into life. This has a positive effect on physical well-being, emotional ease, mental clarity, relationships, and overall fulfilment in life.

Life is a dynamic and ever-changing flow of energy. Everything, from the movement of the planets to the blood circulating in our veins, is an expression of the intelligent energy of life. Everything we experience, from what we see and hear to the thoughts and feelings which arise within us, is an expression of that flow. When we are able to be in the flow of life without resistance, the experience is one of ease and peace. When we fight the flow, resisting what life brings, it creates stress and suffering. Our meditations are meant to help you flow more easily with life. They encourage trust in the way things are naturally unfolding in life. They can help you to become aware of how you are resisting life, or trying to control it, and let that go. The "ease of being" is not about life being easy — there will always be challenges in life. Life will always have its pairs of opposites — pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow — but it is possible to become more at peace. We can learn to let go and drop the resistance to the natural flow of life and living. This letting go results in a profound state of relaxation. Rather than our energy being used for resistance to life, it can be used by the natural intelligence of life to support our physical, mental and emotional well-being. When life energy is able to flow without resistance, we feel more fully alive. Most of us have a habit of resisting certain emotions and pain. When we are able to relax into them, there can be a sense of relief and satisfaction simply from the experience of being alive. To learn to embrace whatever comes in life is an act of love. The author has been a meditator at least since the years 1960.

Dr. Roberto Assagioli MD is recognised as the father of psychosynthesis and this soul infusing psychology has come to be a highly regarded experiential guide to self-realisation. Psychosynthesis facilitates personal development that enables the individual to harness their innate potential with purpose and vitality.

Roberto Assagioli was also responsible for the body of work which is named by two Groups, The Meditation Group for the New Age (MGNA), and The Group for Creative Meditation based on the works of Alice Bailey which are the spiritual companion to psychosynthesis.

Both groups are still available today in UK and USA.. This meditation work enables the individual to introduce the goodwill act of service into their daily lives. In this way, both individually as part of a subjective group, each of us participates in and contributes to the building of a more positive now and a more constructive tomorrow where the core values of the soul guide and influence society.

Roberto Assagioli worked with two co-workers Michal Eastcott and Nancy Magor in developing the two bodies of work as stated above MGNA and CMG. During his annual six week stay at Sundial House in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, International Summer Conferences were held. Roberto Assagioli's talks at these 1960's and 1970's meetings were recorded.

Psychosynthesis has its roots in psychoanalysis. Before founding psychosynthesis, Dr Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974) was a member of the Freud Society in Zurich in 1910 and together with various other pioneers of the psychoanalytic movement was among the first to bring psychoanalysis to Italy. A contemporary and student of Freud, Dr. Roberto Assagioli was more aligned with Jung's approach to psychology.

Influenced by Raja Yoga (concerned with the cultivation of the mind and meditation) and Karma Yoga (concerned with intention, action and will), as well as the writings of Alice Bailey, Assagioli studied philosophy and theology, drawing on Buddhism and Jewish and Christian mysticism for his thinking.

Psychosynthesis is part of a wider movement of psycho-psychic development, exploration and enquiry. It's sometimes called a 'transpersonal' approach because it integrates the spiritual aspect of human experience.

Working in a psycho-psychic way means meeting and including our challenges, pain and shadow, as well as our light and joy. It means including the full range of human experience and working with the present moment.

Psychosynthesis is a liberating discipline – a map to help navigate human experience, and a toolbox for life.

The Psychosynthesis approach affirms the reality of spiritual experience as an integral part of human experience. Psychosynthesis acknowledges our individual uniqueness and our connection to the whole. Where suffering can be caused by a loss of contact with which we really are, the psychosynthesis approach seeks to restore and renew this contact.

Through Meditation we explore the Unconscious

The first step in psychosynthesis is the acquisition of self-knowledge and the ability to move within our inner world with ease and confidence. For this to happen, we must first enter into relationship with those feelings, thoughts and memories that society tends to alienate us from. We can then contact aspects of ourselves we've repressed because we found them too painful to experience, or because they conflict with the conscious image we have of ourselves, or with the dominant cultural norms. Instead of being consistent and unchanging, in this work we find ourselves to be a mix of contrasting, changing elements, which in psychosynthesis are termed subpersonalities.

The 'I'

Through acquiring self-knowledge we discover that there are many aspects, roles and attitudes we identify ourselves with, to the point of forgetting or repressing the rest of our personality. When we identify with one part of ourselves, we're ruled by it. For example, we've all seen someone dominated by anxiety or depression, prejudice or ambition, and we've all felt ourselves at times to be prisoners of psychological patterns that appear to be beyond our control.

Such identification can be reversed only by disidentification: a process through which we detach ourselves from all the various aspects of our personality and allow ourselves to discover our true 'I' or centre. This gives us an experience of inner freedom and helps us to get to know who we really are.

The Will

Self-knowledge, particularly when it leads to an awareness of our true centre, is a step forward. However, even after we've exposed and understood them, old complexes often persist due to years of unconscious repetition. Psychosynthesis

recognises that even deep and thorough self-knowledge may not be sufficient to cause lasting change; it must be accompanied by the discovery and use of the will.

Psychosynthesis sees the will as being basic to mental health. At times we may experience our will instantaneously, when we perform an act of courage or make an irrevocable decision; at other times we may feel it as a flow of energy, as when we concentrate our attention on one subject, or when we persevere with a project we're determined to complete, despite its difficulties. At these times we discover within ourselves the capacity to choose and direct; and this is the will.

The Superconscious

In rare moments we may have an intuitive vision of the nature of the universe, an intense experience of a sense of unity with all beings, a profound understanding of the meaning of life, or an outpouring of creativity – moments in which we transcend the limits of individuality and glimpse a universal reality. These and other phenomena belong to what psychosynthesis calls the superconscious: the level of the unconscious that generates all that's highest and most meaningful for a human being.

While various schools of contemporary psychology often ignore the superconscious, in psychosynthesis particular attention is given to studying these aspects of our experience, observing their effect on the rest of our personality, and using techniques to facilitate these energies and their integration into everyday life.

Synthesis

There's an inherent tendency within organic matter to fluctuate and organise itself in a coherent manner. This can also be seen to operate within the individual; an innate propensity of the psyche to order itself and become a harmonious whole. When the various elements of our being are in conflict, our energy becomes blocked, and this causes pain. However, when a synthesis of two or more parts of our personality occurs, energy is freed and we experience a sense of well-being. This is the essence of psychosynthesis: the harmonious integration of all our component parts around a unifying centre.

The tendency towards synthesis is inherent within us. Rather than being an artificial imposition of techniques, psychosynthesis unblocks and stimulates a process that's more closely allied to us than any other: becoming who we are.

In developing psychosynthesis, Assagioli agreed with Freud that healing childhood trauma and developing a healthy ego were necessary aims of psychotherapy, but held that human growth could not be limited to this alone. A student of philosophical and spiritual traditions of both East and West, Assagioli sought to address human growth as it proceeded beyond the norm of the well-functioning ego; he wished also to support the blossoming of human potential into what Abraham Maslow later termed self-actualization (self-realisation), and further still, into the spiritual or transpersonal dimensions of human experience as well.

In other words, Roberto Assagioli envisioned an approach to the human being which could address both the process of personal growth—of personality integration and self-actualization—as well as transpersonal development—that dimension glimpsed for example in peak experiences (Maslow) of inspired creativity, spiritual insight, and unitive states of consciousness. In addition, psychosynthesis recognizes the process of Self-realization, of contact and response with one's deepest callings and directions in life, which can involve either or both personal and transpersonal development.

Psychosynthesis is therefore one of the earliest forerunners of both humanistic psychology and transpersonal psychology, even preceding Jung's break with Freud by several years. Assagioli's conception has an affinity with existential-humanistic psychology and other approaches which attempt to understand the nature of the healthy personality, personal responsibility and choice, and the actualization of the personal self; similarly, his conception is related to the field of transpersonal psychology, with its focus on higher states of consciousness, spirituality, and human experiencing beyond the individual self. Accordingly, Assagioli served on the board of editors for both the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*.

Roberto Assagioli Assagioli presents the two major theoretical models in his seminal book, Psychosynthesis, models that have remained fundamental to psychosynthesis theory and practice through the years. These two models are 1) a diagram and description of the human person, and the other 2) a stage theory of the process of psychosynthesis (see below).

Aims

In Psychosomatic Medicine and Bio-psychosynthesis, Roberto Assagioli states that the principal aims and tasks of psychosynthesis are:

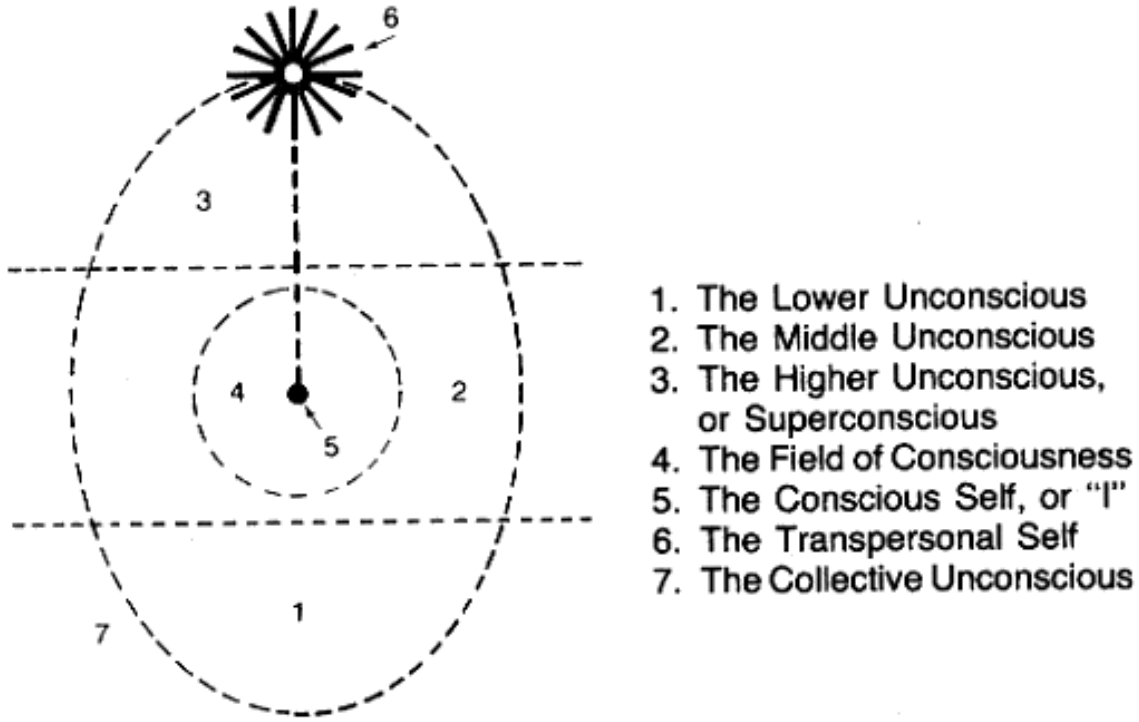
- The elimination of the conflicts and obstacles, conscious and unconscious, that block [the complete and harmonious development of the human personality]

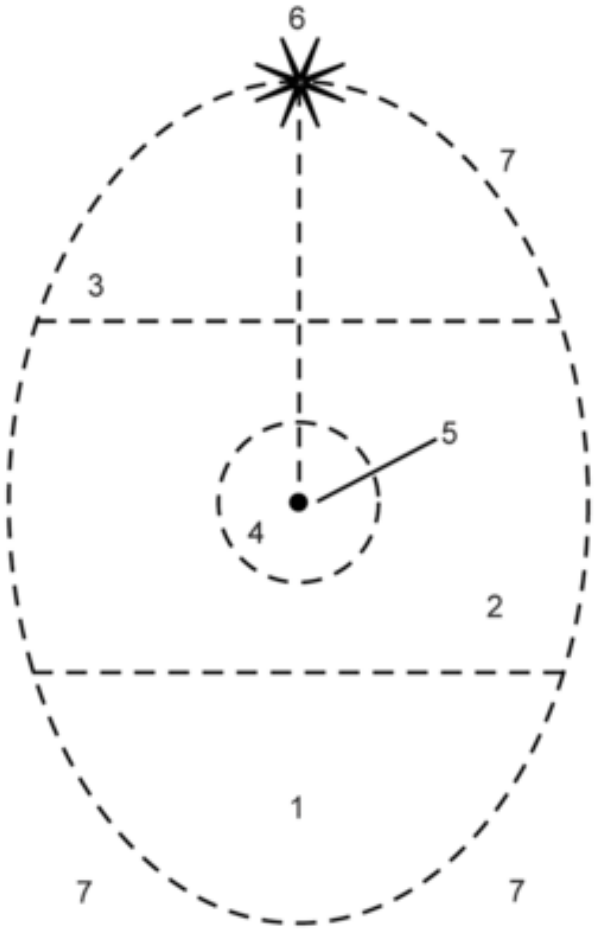
- The use of active techniques to stimulate the psychic functions still weak and immature.

In his major book, Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings (1965), Assagioli writes of three aims of psychosynthesis:

Let us examine whether and how it is possible to solve this central problem of human life, to heal this fundamental infirmity of man. Let us see how he may free himself from this enslavement and achieve an harmonious inner integration, true Self-realization, and right relationships with others.

Egg diagram





Psychosynthesis Egg Diagram

In essence, psychosynthesis can be best represented by an "egg diagram".

The Lower Unconscious
The Middle Unconscious
The Higher Unconscious
The Field of Consciousness
The Conscious Self or "I"
The Higher Self
The Collective Unconscious

Lower unconscious

For Roberto Assagioli, 'the lower unconscious, which contains one's personal psychological past in the form of repressed complexes, long-forgotten memories and dreams and imaginations', stood at the base of the diagram of the mind. The lower unconscious is that realm of the person to which is relegated the experiences of shame, fear, pain, despair, and rage associated with primal wounding suffered in life. One way to think of the lower unconscious is that it is a particular bandwidth of one's experiential range that has been broken away from consciousness. It comprises that range of experience related to the threat of personal annihilation, of destruction of self, of nonbeing, and more generally, of the painful side of the human condition. As long as this range of experience remains unconscious, the person will have a limited ability to be empathic with self or others in the more painful aspects of human life.

At the same time, 'the lower unconscious merely represents the most primitive part of ourselves...It is not bad, it is just earlier '. Indeed, 'the "lower" side has many attractions and great vitality', and - as with Freud's id, or Jung's shadow - the conscious goal must be to 'achieve a creative tension' with the lower unconscious.

Middle Unconscious

The middle unconscious is a sector of the person whose contents, although unconscious, nevertheless support normal conscious functioning in an ongoing way (thus it is illustrated as most immediate to "I"). It is the capacity to form patterns of skills, behaviours, feelings, attitudes, and abilities that can function without conscious attention, thereby forming the infrastructure of one's conscious life.
The function of the middle unconscious can be seen in all spheres of human development, from learning to walk and talk, to acquiring languages, to mastering a trade or profession, to developing social roles. Anticipating today's neuroscience, Assagioli even referred to "developing new neuromuscular patterns". All such elaborate syntheses of thought, feeling, and behaviour are built upon learnings and abilities that must eventually operate unconsciously. For Assagioli, 'Human healing and growth that involves work with either the middle or the lower unconscious is known as personal psychosynthesis '.

Higher Unconscious

Assagioli termed 'the sphere of aesthetic experience, creative inspiration, and higher states of consciousness...the higher unconscious'. The higher unconscious

(or superconscious) denotes “our higher potentialities which seek to express themselves, but which we often repel and repress” (Assagioli). As with the lower unconscious, this area is by definition not available to consciousness, so its existence is inferred from moments in which contents from that level affect consciousness. Contact with the higher unconscious can be seen in those moments, termed peak experiences by Maslow, which are often difficult to put into words, experiences in which one senses deeper meaning in life, a profound serenity and peace, a universality within the particulars of existence, or perhaps a unity between oneself and the cosmos. This level of the unconscious represents an area of the personality that contains the “heights” overarching the “depths” of the lower unconscious. As long as this range of experience remains unconscious - in what Desoille termed '"repression of the sublime" - the person will have a limited ability to be empathic with self or other in the more sublime aspects of human life.

The higher unconscious thus represents 'an autonomous realm, from where we receive our higher intuitions and inspirations - altruistic love and will, humanitarian action, artistic and scientific inspiration, philosophic and spiritual insight, and the drive towards purpose and meaning in life'. It may be compared to Freud's superego, seen as 'the higher, moral, supra-personal side of human nature...a higher nature in man', incorporating 'Religion, morality, and a social sense - the chief elements in the higher side of man...putting science and art to one side'.

Subpersonalities

Subpersonalities based in the personal unconscious form a central strand in psychosynthesis thinking. 'One of the first people to have started really making use of subpersonalities for therapy and personal growth was Roberto Assagioli', psychosynthesis reckoning that 'subpersonalities exist at various levels of organization, complexity, and refinement' throughout the mind. A five-fold process of recognition, acceptance, co-ordination, integration, and synthesis 'leads to the discovery of the Transpersonal Self, and the realization that that is the final truth of the person, not the subpersonalities'.

Some subpersonalities may be seen 'as psychological contents striving to emulate an archetype...degraded expressions of the archetypes of higher qualities '. Others will resist the process of integration; will 'take the line that it is difficult being alive, and it is far easier - and safer - to stay in an undifferentiated state'.

“I”

“I” is the direct "reflection" or "projection" of Self (Assagioli) and the essential being of the person, distinct but not separate from all contents of experience. “I” possesses the two functions of consciousness, or awareness, and will, whose field of operation is represented by the concentric circle around “I” in the oval diagram - Personal Will.

Psychosynthesis suggests that 'we can experience the will as having four stages. The first stage could be described as "having no will"', and might perhaps be linked with the hegemony of the lower unconscious. 'The next stage of the will is understanding that "will exists". We might still feel that we cannot actually do it, but we know...it is possible'. 'Once we have developed our will, at least to some degree, we pass to the next stage which is called "having a will"', and thereafter 'in psychosynthesis we call the fourth and final stage of the evolution of the will in the individual "being will"' - which then 'relates to the "I" or self...draws energy from the transpersonal self'.

The "I" is placed at the centre of the field of awareness and will in order to indicate that “I” is the one who has consciousness and will. It is “I” who is aware of the psyche-soma contents as they pass in and out of awareness; the contents come and go, while “I” may remain present to each experience as it arises. But “I” is dynamic as well as receptive: “I” has the ability to affect the contents of awareness and can even affect awareness itself, by choosing to focus awareness (as in many types of meditation), expand it, or contract it. Since “I” is distinct from any and all contents and structures of experience, “I” can be thought of as not a “self” at all but as “no-self.” That is, “I” is never the object of experience. “I” is who can experience, for example, the ego disintegrating and reforming, who can encounter emptiness and fullness, who can experience utter isolation or cosmic unity, who can engage any and all arising experiences. “I” is not any particular experience but the experiencer, not object but subject, and thus cannot be seen or grasped as an object of consciousness. This “no-self” view of “I” can be seen in Assagioli’s discussion of “I” as a reflection of Self: “The reflection appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no autonomous substantiality. It is, in other words, not a new and different light but a projection of its luminous source”. The next section describes this “luminous source”, Self.

Self

Pervading all the areas mapped by the oval diagram, distinct but not separate from all of them, is Self (which has also been called Higher Self or Transpersonal Self).

The concept of Self points towards a source of wisdom and guidance within the person, a source which can operate quite beyond the control of the conscious personality. Since Self pervades all levels, an ongoing lived relationship with Self—Self-realization—may lead anywhere on the diagram as one's direction unfolds (this is one reason for not illustrating Self at the top of the diagram, a representation that tends to give the impression that Self-realization leads only into the higher unconscious). Relating to Self may lead for example to engagement with addictions and compulsions, to the heights of creative and religious experience, to the mysteries of unitive experience, to issues of meaning and mortality, to grappling with early childhood wounding, to discerning a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

The relationship of "I" and Self is paradoxical. Assagioli was clear that “I” and Self were from one point of view one, writing, “There are not really two selves, two independent and separate entities. The Self is one”. Such a non-dual unity is a fundamental aspect of this level of experience. But Assagioli also understood that there could be a meaningful relationship between the person and Self as well:

Accounts of religious experiences often speak of a “call” from God, or a “pull” from some Higher Power; this sometimes starts a “dialogue” between the man [or woman] and this “higher Source”...

Assagioli did not of course limit this relationship and dialogue to those dramatic experiences of “call” seen in the lives of great men and women throughout history. Rather, the potential for a conscious relationship with Self exists for every person at all times and may be assumed to be implicit in every moment of every day and in every phase of life, even when one does not recognize this. Whether within one’s private inner world of feelings, thoughts, and dreams, or within one’s relationships with other people and the natural world, a meaningful ongoing relationship with Self may be lived.

Stages

Writing about the model of the person presented above, Assagioli states that it is a “structural, static, almost ‘anatomical’ representation of our inner constitution,

while it leaves out its dynamic aspect, which is the most important and essential one". Thus he follows this model immediately with a stage theory outlining the process of psychosynthesis. This scheme can be called the "stages of psychosynthesis," and is presented here.

It is important to note that although the linear progression of the following stages does make logical sense, these stages may not in fact be experienced in this sequence; they are not a ladder up which one climbs, but aspects of a single process. Further, one never outgrows these stages; any stage can be present at any moment throughout the process of Psychosynthesis, Assaglioli acknowledging 'persisting traits belonging to preceding psychological ages' and the perennial possibility of 'retrogression to primitive stages'.

The stages of Psychosynthesis may be tabulated as follows:

1. Thorough knowledge of one's personality.
2. Control of its various elements.
3. Realization of one's true Self -- the discovery or creation of a unifying centre.
4. Psychosynthesis: the formation or reconstruction of the personality around a new centre.

Methods

Psychosynthesis was regarded by Roberto Assagioli as more of an orientation and a general approach to the whole human being, and as existing apart from any of its particular concrete applications. This approach allows for a wide variety of techniques and methods to be used within the psychosynthesis context. 'Dialogue, Gestalt techniques, dream work, guided imagery, affirmations, and meditation are all powerful tools for integration', but 'the attitude and presence of the guide are of far greater importance than the particular methods used'. Sand tray, art therapy, journaling, drama therapy, and body work; cognitive-behavioural techniques; object relations, self psychology, and family systems approaches, may all be used in different contexts, from individual and group psychotherapy, to meditation and self-help groups. Psychosynthesis offers an overall view which can help orient oneself within the vast array of different modalities available today, and be applied either for therapy or for self actualization.

One broad classification of the techniques used involves the following headings: 'Analytical: To help identify blocks and enable the exploration of the unconscious'. Psychosynthesis stresses 'the importance of using obstacles as steps to growth' - 'blessing the obstacle...blocks are our helpers'.

‘Mastery...the eight psychological functions need to be gradually retrained to produce permanent positive change'. ' Transformation...the refashioning of the personality around a new centre'. ' Grounding...into the concrete terms of daily life. ' Relational...to cultivate qualities such as love, openness and empathy'.

Psychosynthesis allows practitioners the recognition and validation of an extensive range of human experience: the vicissitudes of developmental difficulties and early trauma; the struggle with compulsions, addictions, and the trance of daily life; the confrontation with existential identity, choice, and responsibility; levels of creativity, peak performance, and spiritual experience; and the search for meaning and direction in life. None of these important spheres of human existence need be reduced to the other, and each can find its right place in the whole. This means that no matter what type of experience is engaged, and no matter what phase of growth is negotiated, the complexity and uniqueness of the person may be respected—a fundamental principle in any application of psychosynthesis.

Criticism

Psychosynthesis, for better or worse, 'has always been on the fringes of the "official" therapy world', and it 'is only recently that the concepts and methods of psychoanalysis and group analysis have been introduced into the training and practice of psychosynthesis psychotherapy'.

As a result, the movement has been at times exposed to the dangers of fossilisation and cultism, so that on occasion, having 'started out reflecting the high-minded spiritual philosophy of its founder, [it] became more and more authoritarian, more and more strident in its conviction that psychosynthesis was the said One Truth'.

A more technical danger is that premature concern with the transpersonal may hamper dealing with personal psychosynthesis: for example, 'evoking serenity...might produce a false sense of well-being and security'. Practitioners have noted how 'inability to...integrate the superconscious contact with everyday experience easily leads to inflation', and have spoken of 'an "Icarus complex", the tendency whereby spiritual ambition fails to take personality limitations into account and causes all sorts of psychological difficulties'.

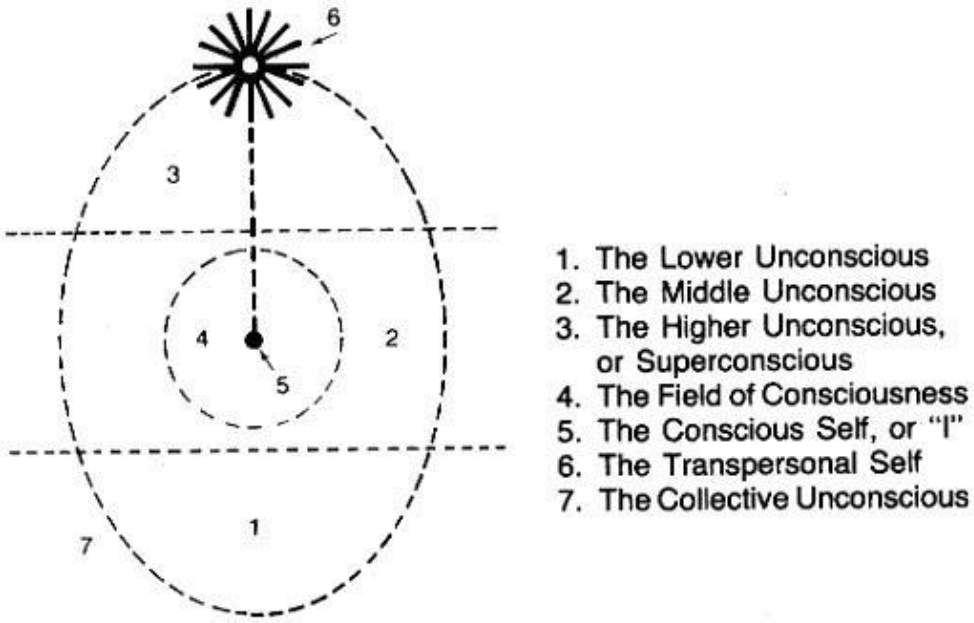
Consciousness

Along the Psychologists Carl Gustav Jung and Dr. Roberto Assagioli, MD, founder of Psychosynthesis

(*Taken from own translation of the Bhagavad Gita translated from the Sanskrit in English along ancient manuscripts, and various other sources and research material, page 16 and further. Ebook-free download.)*

http://static.skynetblogs.be/media/163941/2683712515.pdf

https://www.scribd.com/doc/16090179/The-Bhagavad-Gita-in-English



The Egg – Diagram as designed by Dr. Roberto Assagioli, M.D.

Consciousness is our knowing that we know; that phase of knowing by which we take cognizance of our existence and of our relation to what we call environment. Environment is made by ideas held in mind and objectified. The ideas that are held in mind are the basis of all consciousness. The nature of the ideas upon which consciousness is formed gives character to it. Consciousness, the direct awareness: the incessant flow of sensation, images, thoughts, feelings, desires, and impulses, which one can observe, analyse, and judge.

The subconscious mind, or subjective consciousness, is the sum of all man's past thinking. It may be called memory. The subconscious sometimes acts

separately from the conscious mind, for instance, in dreams and in its work of carrying in bodily functions, such as breathing and digestion. The subconscious mind has no power to do original thinking. It acts upon what is given it through the conscious or the subconscious mind. All our involuntary or automatic activities are of the subconscious mind, they are the result of our having trained ourselves by the conscious mind to form certain habits and do certain things without having to centre our thought upon them consciously.

Personal consciousness is formed from limited, selfish ideas.

Sense consciousness is a mental state formed from believing in and acting through the senses. It is the serpent consciousness, deluded with sensation. Since an individual becomes attached to whatever he thinks about, the result of his forming sense consciousness is that he withdraws his consciousness from the Supreme Being, and looses conscious connection with his Source.

Material consciousness is much the same as personal and sense consciousness. It is a state of mind based on belief in the reality of materiality, or in things as they appear.

The Conscious Self or the "I", the point within the embodied of pure self-awareness, different from the changing content of our consciousness (the sensations, thoughts, feelings, and more).

The Superconsciousness, or superconscious mind, is the Higher Self, a state of consciousness that is based on true ideas, upon an understanding and realisation of the Oneness of Truth as related in the Bhagavad Gita.

> The Higher Self, or the "Self" with a capital letter, submerged in the ceaseless flow of psychological contents, disappearing (walking away as it were) when we fall asleep, when we faint, when we are under the effect of an anaesthetic or narcotic, or in a state of hypnosis, and when one awakes the "Self" is appearing again.

The Collective Consciousness. According to Jung, consciousness, seemingly the sine qua non of humanity is just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath consciousness lies a much larger substratum of forgotten or repressed personal memories, feelings and behaviours, which Jung termed the personal unconscious. Moreover, beneath that lies the deep sea of collective unconscious, huge and ancient (Brahman), filled with all the images and behaviours (souls, entities) that have been repeated over and over (reincarnation) throughout the history of not only humanity, but also life itself (all creation). As Jung said: "… the deeper you go, the broader the base becomes."

The Collective Consciousness consists of images and behavioural patterns not acquired by an individual in his or her lifetime, yet accessible to all individuals in all times, “unconscious” because it cannot be reached through conscious awareness. Here is faith and intent, prayer, meditation, Gita standards essential to open ourselves up to the universal but hidden treasure. The collective unconscious or consciousness (as I prefer to say) dwells in each of us. Much of our life is structured by the archetypal symbols that are the organised units of the collective unconscious (consciousness).

The Collective Unconscious and Its Archetypes

A short introduction on archetypes

'Archetype' defies simple definition. The word derives from a Greek compound of arche and tupos. Arche or 'first principle' points to the creative source, which cannot be represented or seen directly. Tupos, or 'impression', refers to any one of the numerous manifestations of the 'first principle' (Joseph Henderson, from ARAS Vol.1: Archetypal Symbolism p.viii). Jung himself spoke of the "endlessness of the archetype, with its multiple meanings" (Collected Works of CG Jung, 16:491), and had many different thoughts about archetypes throughout his professional life. Just as in the process of using this online site it is helpful to circle around the diverse meanings of a symbol, perhaps it would be helpful to circle around 'archetype' by looking at some of the ways Jung described it in his collected works (volume and paragraph are cited).

An Archetype is an inner guide, which presents us with the deep structure for our experience, motivation and meaning. These Archetypes aid us on our own unique life's journey or pilgrimage. They help us to discover our personal motivations and what gives our lives, brands and business their unique meaning.

We encounter Archetypes in a variety of ways, some of the most common through advertising, art, literature, television and the cinema. They invoke a variety of responses that decide how we think and act.

We each have our own personal archetypes, intimate companions that are with us and can be contacted and used. These are the source

of our personal power. The ancients and indigenous peoples called these intimates, Spirit Guides or Allies.

These are our survival archetypes. They are the intimate companions of your intuition. All four influence how we relate to material power, respond to authority, and make choices. You can read more about them on the Traditional Archetype page.

These four symbolize our four life challenges as we grow toward adulthood. How we negotiate these challenges determines a lot about our personal power and who we are in the world.

You will have a chance to meet your personal archetypes on the Power Animal, Teacher, and Working with Your Personal Archetype pages.

The Value of the Archetype

It is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them (CW8:794).

[For the alchemists] they were seeds of light broadcast in the chaos... the seed plot of a world to come... One would have to conclude from these alchemical visions that the archetypes have about them a certain effulgence or quasi-consciousness, and that numinosity entails luminosity (CW8:388).

All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes. This is particularly true of religious ideas, but the central concepts of science, philosophy, and ethics are no exception to this rule. In their present form they are variants of archetypal ideas created by consciously applying and adapting these ideas to reality. For it is the function of consciousness not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us (CW8, 342).

Archetypes are visual symbols or energetic imprints that exist in our psyches. Some are readily understood while others bring subliminal messages that are there to help you trigger your memory of why you are here and the truth behind the illusion of reality. Archetypes can often convey messages that verbal and written information cannot.

Archetypes are found everywhere, as their symbols are a language of the mind, taken to different frequencies of thought and connected to each other by the collective unconsciousness. There are individual and universal archetypes. You become aware of them in meditation, dreamtime, remote viewing or other out- of-body experiences, when you doodle on a pad, crop circles or landscape art, other art forms, jewellery, hieroglyphs, a logo, on a billboard, anywhere at all.

Archetypes can also be auditory, a tone, a series of notes, a harmonic. Reality is a series of metaphors set into motion by the synchronicity of archetypes we experience.

The term Archetype began with Carl Jung. In Jung's terms, 'Archetype' is defined as the first original model of which all other similar persons, objects, or concepts are merely derivative, copied, patterned, or emulated. These patterns derive from a universal collective unconscious which in metaphysics is called the Grids, Akashic Records, Sea of Consciousness, that which creates our reality

In this context, archetypes are innate prototypes for ideas, which may subsequently become involved in the interpretation of observed phenomena. Master or Universal archetypes are created by the patterns of Sacred Geometry. The remainder are derivatives of these patterns.

Ways of Naming the Archetype

The contents of the collective unconscious... are known as archetypes (CW9(1):4). ...we are dealing with archaic or— I would say — primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times (CW9(1):5).

...archetypes probably represent typical situations in life (CW8:255). ...qualities that are not individually acquired but are inherited... inborn forms of "intuition," namely the archetypes of perception and apprehension, which are the necessary a priori determinants of all psychic processes (CW8:270).

It seems to me their origin can only be explained by assuming them to be deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity (CW7:109).

How an Archetype Expresses Itself

The term 'archetype' is often misunderstood as meaning a certain definite mythological image or motif... on the contrary, [it is] an inherited tendency of the human mind to form representations of mythological motifs — representations that vary a great deal without losing their basic pattern... This inherited tendency is instinctive, like the specific impulse of nest-building, migration, etc. in birds. One finds the representations collectives practically everywhere, characterized by the same or similar motifs. They cannot be assigned to any particular time or region or race.
They are without known origin, and they can reproduce themselves even where transmission through migration must be ruled out (CW 18:523). ...besides [the intellect] there is a thinking in primordial images — in symbols which are older than historic man, which are inborn in him from the earliest times, and, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche (CW8:794).

As the products of imagination are always in essence visual, their forms must, from the outset, have the character of images and moreover of typical images, which is why... I call them 'archetypes' (CW 11:845).

. . . [Tribal] lore is concerned with archetypes that have been modified in a special way. Another well-known expression of the archetypes is myth and fairytale (CW 9 (1):5,6).

The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its color from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear (CW 9(1):6).

The Archetype's Link with Ancestral Life

> The collective unconscious comprises in itself the psychic life of our ancestors right back to the earliest beginnings. It is the matrix of all conscious psychic occurrences... (CW 8:230)
>
> An archetype is like an old watercourse along which the water of life has flowed for centuries, digging a deep channel for itself (CW10:395). ... for the contents of the collective unconscious are not only residues of archaic, specifically human modes of functioning, but also the residues of functions from [our] animal ancestry, whose duration in time was infinitely greater than the relatively brief epoch of specifically human existence (CW 7:159).

How do I identify the archetypal energies that are affecting my own life?

> To identify the particular archetypal energies that are affecting your life involves a combination of intuition and a 'symbolic' review of your life.
>
> What you are doing when you undertake this exercise is that you are identifying the archetypal patterns of power that are with you. In naming and understanding these 'patterns' in your life, you are capturing all the stories and the myths that are contained within that power and that are playing out in your life.
>
> When people first start looking at their archetypes, they always pick the archetypes they aspire to be rather than the ones that are actually playing out in their lives. This is why getting somebody else to help you name the patterns in your life can be so powerful - as somebody outside your life can often find it easier to help you identify and name the patterns than you will.

Continue reading the book “Psychosynthesis” by Dr. Roberto Assagioli, M.D. (my edition being from Hobbs, Dorman & Company, INC. New York/Buenos Aires (1965). Chapter: Initiated Symbol Projection, page 287 to 298.) Carl Gustav Jung: The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (From Collected Works of C.G.Jung, Volume 9, Part 1), Routledge, London (1996).

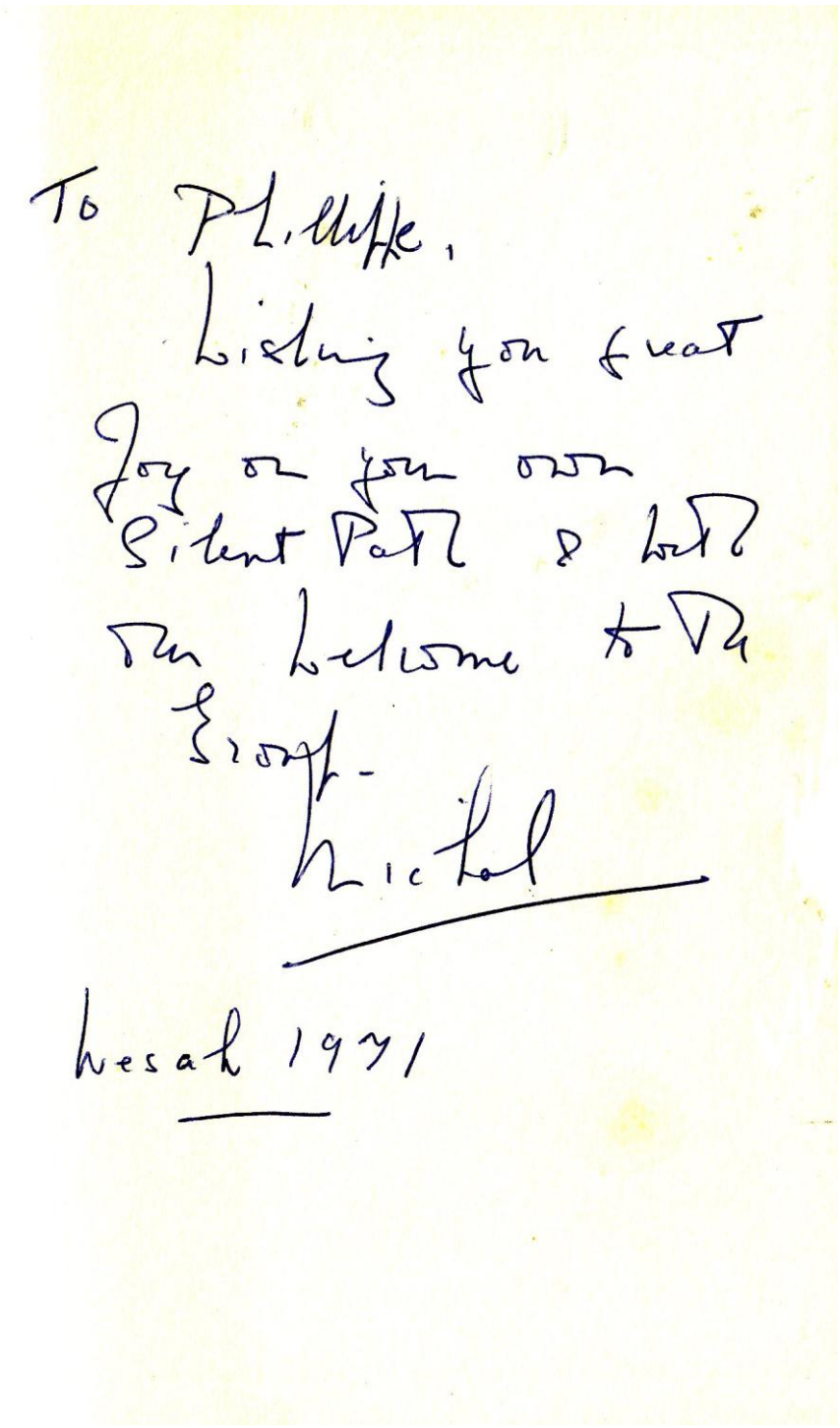
Dr. Roberto Assagioli, M.D. at the centre (Sundial House, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, UK

Michael Eastcott (left) – Nancy Magor (right) of Dr. Roberto Assagioli's team at Sundial House, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, UK

Dr. Roberto Assagioli, M.D. (right)

Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.
MGNA & CMG
Principal French Section

François Geldof
helper
with the publications of the two-monthly booklets and distribution.
Years 1970-1975



The True Self, the False Self and the Ego

Introduction

The world defines us by our name, gender, nationality, race, religion, height, weight, role, job, etc., but these superficial descriptions are not who we truly are. If we look a little deeper we may describe ourselves in terms of our beliefs, thoughts, mood, emotions, desires, interests, etc. But these things are transient – they change, they evolve, they come and go – they are not constant so they cannot be who we truly are.

If we look back over our entire life we notice that one thing has remained constant over the years – our sense of awareness. Our awareness is the common factor that links our earliest childhood memories to the present day. Our awareness has experienced every event in our life; in a seamless series of present moments. When we sense deeper into our field of awareness we discover that it has qualities, attributes, characteristics and a sense of identity that goes far deeper than our personality. This is the essence of who we truly are.

The True Self

The Self is both a field of consciousness and a point of consciousness, which is the core of our being – refer to Figure 1. The Self (monad) is the centre of our field of awareness (soul), and our field of awareness (soul) is an extension of our Self. The Self has two primary functions:

1. **Directing our life** (will): The Self interacts with the world by directing our thoughts (mind), emotions (heart) and actions (body).
2. **Experiencing our life** (awareness): a) **Directly**: The Self experiences life directly through its field of awareness (the soul).

a) **Indirectly**: The Self experiences life indirectly by perceiving our personality's thoughts (mind), emotions (heart) and senses (body).

The mind, heart and body (which collectively make up our personality) are not our true Self, but they are aspects of our Being. It has been said that "we are spiritual beings having a human experience". Our Self is the transpersonal/spiritual element; our mind, heart and body are the personal/human elements; and our field of pure awareness (soul) unites them all into a Human Being.

The mind, heart and body enable us to function in the world and experience the fullness of life:

1. The mind is the domain of our thoughts, concepts and beliefs.
2. The heart is the domain of our emotions and desires.
3. The body is the domain of our instincts, impulses and actions.

Like the Self, the mind, heart and body are centres of consciousness and fields of consciousness . We will focus on the centres first:

• The human brain is divided into 3 main sections: the Neo-Cortex, the Limbic System and the Basal Brain, which are associated with thoughts, emotions and actions respectively.
• The human body is also divided into 3 main sections: the Head, the Thorax (chest) and the Abdomen (belly), which are associated with thoughts, emotions and instincts respectively.
• The Eastern traditions recognise three centres of subtle energy and consciousness which are located in the head (upper tan tien), chest (middle tan tien) and belly (lower tan tien or hara).
• The Sufi tradition recognises three centres of subtle energy and consciousness which are located in the head (path), chest (oth) and belly (kath).
• Gurdjieff recognised three centres of energy and consciousness which are located in the head (thinking centre), chest (emotional centre) and belly (moving centre).
• The Enneagram recognises three centres of intelligence: the head centre, the heart centre and the body centre.

Theosophy and esoteric science recognise three centres of energy and conscious which are located in the head (mental permanent molecule), chest (emotional permanent atom) and belly (physical permanent atom). Refer to *The Science of Spirituality* by Lee Bladon for further details.

For simplicity I identify these three centres by their physiological locations:

1. The Head centre is located in the centre of the head (between the temples). It is our primary centre of mental consciousness and our mental energy store.
2. The Heart centre is located in the centre of the chest (behind the centre of the breastbone). It is our primary centre of emotional consciousness and our emotional energy store. It is also known as the "high heart", the "soul seat" (Barbara Brennan) and the "assemblage point" (Carlos Castaneda).

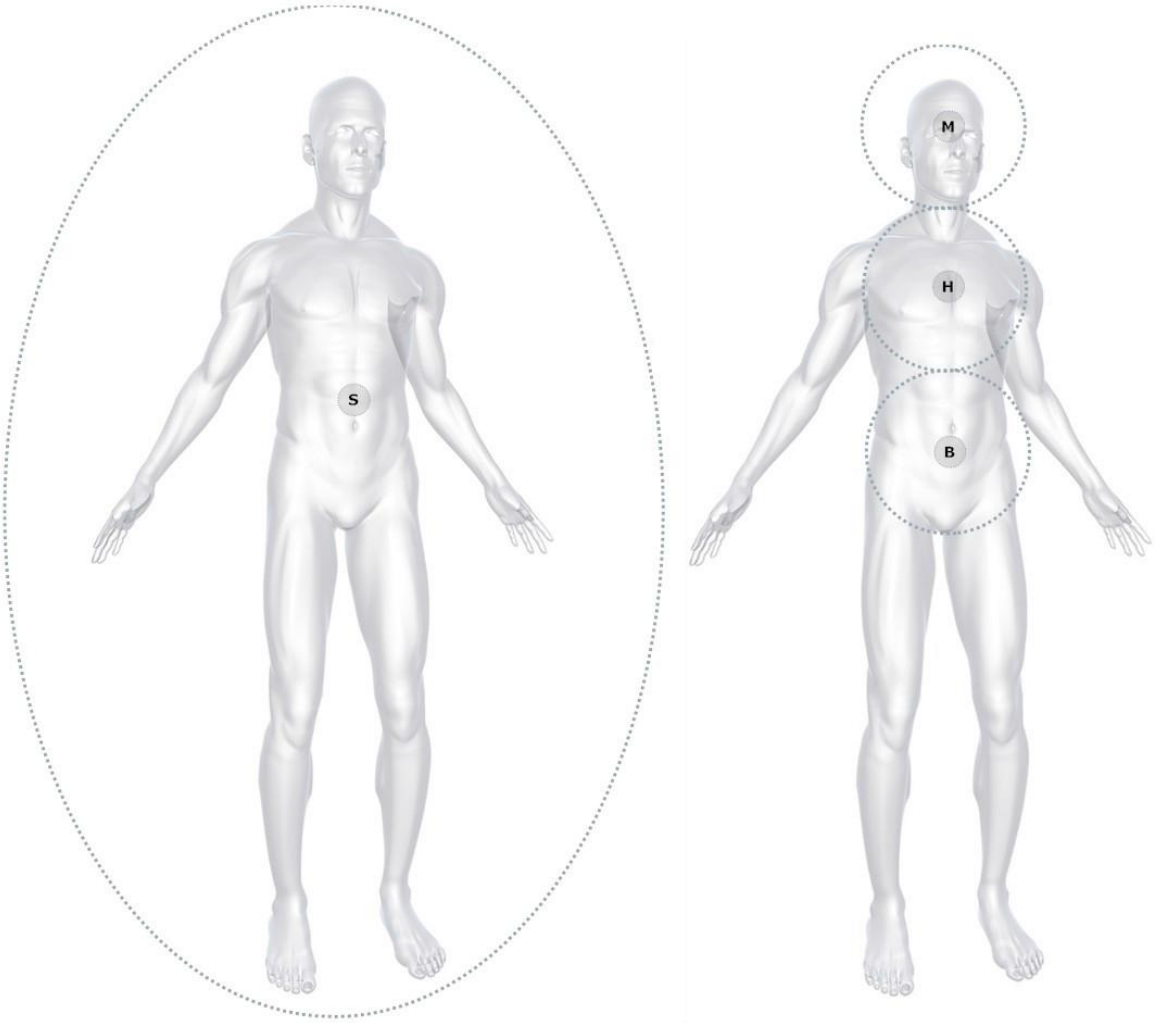
3. The Body/Belly centre is located in the centre of the abdomen (just below the navel). It is our primary centre of physical consciousness and our body's vital energy store. Its physical counterpart is the abdominal brain; about 100 million neurons that can function independently of the cranial brain to control some of the body's basic functions.

The fields of consciousness surrounding these three centres pervade and surround the entire human body, but the majority of their activity is concentrated in the area surrounding each centre – refer to

Figure 2.

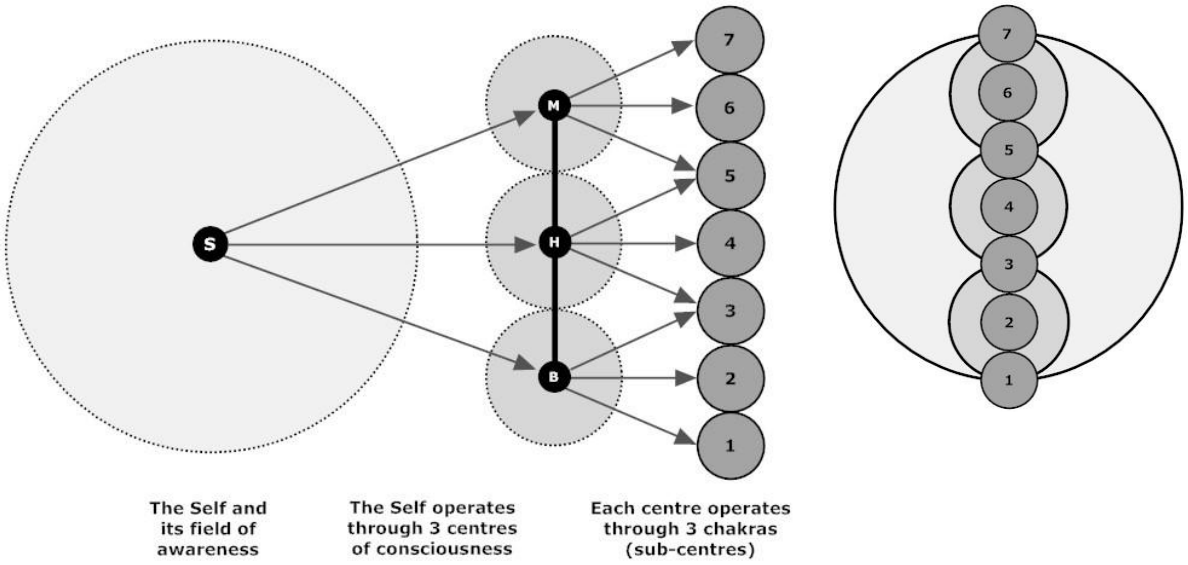
The Self's primary field of consciousness (the soul or the causal body) pervades the entire physical body and extends about 100cm (40") beyond, as depicted in Figure 1. The mind's field of consciousness (the mental body) is concentrated in the head but it pervades the entire physical body and extends about 60-80cm (24-30") beyond. The heart's field of consciousness (the emotional body) is concentrated in the chest but it pervades the entire physical body and extends 30-50cm (12-20") beyond. The body's field of consciousness (the energy body) is concentrated in the belly but it pervades the entire physical body and extends about 2cm (1") beyond. The mind, heart and body centres are connected together for seamless integration of consciousness, and the Self can move its awareness around them at will. Collectively these three centres of consciousness constitute the authentic personality.

Figure 1: The Self and its Field of Awareness (Soul) Figure 2: The Mind, Heart and Body Centres



Just as the Self operates through three primary centres of consciousness (mind, heart and body), each of the three centres operates through three secondary centres of consciousness. These secondary centres are known as the seven major chakras. Figure 3 depicts the relationship between the Self, the three centres and the seven chakras. The chakras help to integrate the centres of consciousness with the body's energy meridians and nervous system. The Self integrates with the physical body through the following sequence:

Self > 3 Centres > 7 Chakras > Energy Meridians > Nervous System > Physical Body



We are not a Self living within a body; we are a body, heart and mind living within a Self/soul. Our body, heart and mind all exist within the field of our Self (soul). Our body, heart and mind only exist for a few decades within the eternal field of our Self (soul).

Creation of the False-Self

The previous section described who we really are, but that is probably not who we think we are. The "I" that we think we are is probably not who we really are. Unless we are Self-realised or enlightened, we are "asleep" to our true nature – we have forgotten who we truly are. We live from a self-created (false) centre of consciousness which is known as the ego-self.

When we were born, our personal consciousness was undeveloped and inexperienced, and we had very little understanding of the world outside of us. As we learnt about the world we gradually constructed a mental model of how we believed things were out there. The more we learnt about the outer-world, the more complex our inner-world model became. Over time, it developed into a meticulously detailed virtual representation of reality. The virtual-reality world inside our mind was a near-perfect representation of the real world, but it was (and still is) coloured by our beliefs and distorted by our misconceptions.

Our interactions with other people helped us to fit them into our inner model, and their interactions with us helped us to develop our own concept of self and

fit that into our inner model. The concept of self that we developed through our interactions with others was that we are a separate individual contained within a physical body. This was very different to our inherent sense of true-Self, which is pure, radiant, infinite and one-with-everything. So, at this early stage of life we could sense two different selves – our true-Self and our "false" mental concept of self. The two selves were so different that we didn't know which one to go with – we didn't know who we were.

Our parents related to us as if we were a separate individual in a physical body (our false-self); not as if we were an infinite radiant being (our true-Self). They interacted with our false-self and pretty much ignored our true-Self. Only our false-self got validated, so we eventually went with that one. Essentially, the false-self came into being because we were not seen for who we truly are. Our false-self became our identity and our virtual inner-world became our home.

Obviously, we can't live solely in our virtual world because we have to eat, drink and interact with the real world in order to survive. We have to maintain a connection between our virtual inner world and the real world, so we project our virtual world and virtual-self out onto the real world. This gives us the impression that we (false-self) are living in the real world. We perceive the real world with our virtual world seamlessly projected over it. This virtual world overlay is what makes an anorexic person believe they are fat, or a tone-deaf person believe they are a great singer.

When our two images of "reality" don't match up; when our real-world experience clashes with our inner-world expectations, our inner-world and our (false) sense of self are de-stabilised. This makes us anxious, so we feel compelled to reinforce our (false) sense of self and our model of reality by justifying, denying or blaming someone else. Our false-self feels safe and in control in its virtual inner world, but it has very little influence on the real outer-world, so we often get frustrated when things don't go our way.

Our virtual world provides the added benefit of distancing us from the confusing, distressing and traumatic situations of the real world. As a young child we learnt how to use our virtual world as a psychological buffer to soften the impact of real-world distress. It allowed us to block out or distort certain aspects of our reality, paint a rosier picture of our life and justify other people's negative behaviour towards us. It allowed our innocent and immature personal consciousness to cope with the sometimes harsh realities of the real world. Over time we stopped perceiving the real world directly because it felt safer to perceive life indirectly, through the intermediary of the mind. Over time we

became so identified with our false-self and our virtual-world that we fell asleep to objective reality and forgot who we truly are.

Creation of the Ego (the false personality)

Soon after we identified with our false concept of self, but before we learnt to use our virtual world as a psychological buffer, something very significant occurred. Next to the creation of the false-self it was probably the most significant event of our life because it fundamentally shaped our self-image, our view of the world and our entire approach to life. This momentous event was our first psychological wound – the first time our newly-created false-self felt hurt. It had a profound effect on us because our false-self had not "solidified" yet, and the primary wound is what solidified it. The primary wound shaped the nature of our false-self by programming it with our primary belief. Our primary belief was our innocent false-self's response to our primary wound. As a direct result of the primary wound our false-self naively and incorrectly believed that it was inadequate or deficient in some way. The primary belief was "I am not good enough", or something similar, such as: I am unlovable, helpless, lost, abandoned, insecure, powerless or unworthy. From the perspective of the false-self there is an element of truth in these beliefs because compared to the true-Self the false-self is like a poor black and white photocopy of a scintillatingly beautiful living masterpiece, and deep down we know it. But from the perspective of our true-Self there is zero truth in these beliefs – we are none of these negative things – we are perfect, radiant, complete and limitless.

The primary belief that imprinted into our false-self is the seed around which our ego formed. Our entire ego and our general approach to life were heavily influenced by that one false belief. Soothing the feelings of lack associated with our primary belief became our main objective in life. Few of us are aware of this underlying objective that profoundly shapes our approach to life, because it dwells deep within us, at the very core of our being. Most of us avoid going into the depths of our being because we don't want to stir up our repressed hurts, fears and inadequacies. We generally like to keep our awareness at the periphery of our being, just as we generally like to keep our conversations and relationships on a superficial level where little harm can be done.

So what exactly is the ego? The ego is the false-self's field of consciousness, just as the soul is the true-Self's primary field of consciousness. The true-Self's field of consciousness is fluid, dynamic and imbued with an array of essential qualities (which will be discussed shortly), but the false-self's field of consciousness is rigid and structured, with no inherent qualities. The false-self has to program the ego to tell it what to do and how to behave in each situation.

The ego is programmed with our default reactions to life. If we encounter a situation that is similar to one we have previously experienced, we will already have a default pre-programmed response. That program will automatically activate (unless we have the conscious awareness to intervene), causing us to react automatically (without any conscious involvement). This is the first major problem with the ego – it keeps us on autopilot; it keeps us half asleep.

The second major problem with the ego is that most of its programs (our beliefs, strategies, thought patterns, emotional reactions and automated behaviours) were initially programmed when we were very young, so many of our reactions to life are immature and inappropriate. Some of our programs were updated and re-written as we became older and more experienced, but the deeper ones were created by and created from very young, naïve, immature and inexperienced consciousness. These old patterns are responsible for most of the unnecessary suffering in our lives, but our fear of venturing into the depths of our being allows our immature core (our inner child) to endure, and our unnecessary suffering to continue.

The third major problem with the ego is that it believes we are separate from everyone else and separate from life, rather than an integral part of humanity and an integral part of life. The ego believes we are a separate individual because it is just a thought-form trapped inside our mind and isolated from the rest of the world. The false belief that we are isolated and separate creates fear, which feeds another false belief – that we must protect and defend ourselves psychologically. Many of the ego's programs are concerned with protecting us, defending our position, and counter-attacking anyone who questions us or our beliefs – which brings us nicely onto point 4.

The fourth major problem with the ego is that, deep down it knows it is not real; it knows it was created by the mind; it knows it is just an elaborate thought-form, so it inherently feels unsteady and unsafe. Any confusing, traumatic or distressing experience shakes the ego to its core. It constantly fears for its "life" so it has to develop coping mechanisms, survival strategies and defensive behaviours to strengthen itself and reinforce its position. Lots of physical, emotional and mental energy is consumed in maintaining the ego's belief structures, coping structures and defensive structures. I call them structures because they are thought-forms that are constructed out of mental "matter".

As the false-self creates new ego structures (beliefs, behaviours, strategies, programs, etc.), it expands into them, identifies with them and becomes one with them. The false-self expands into the structures to create the ego. We then spend

the rest of our lives defending our false-self and reinforcing our ego. These behaviours are the cause of all our unnecessary suffering.

Note: Not all behavioural patterns and automated responses are ego structures – many of them are essential to life, allowing us to breathe, move, eat, digest, walk, talk, read and drive without giving them our full conscious attention. These automated patterns start developing as soon as we are capable of learning (i.e. in the womb). But they are not ego structures if we don't identify with them, take them personally or believe they are us.

Meditation Techniques for Freethinkers

Along Dr. Roberto Assagioli, M.D. founder of Psychosynthesis

Introduction

There are today many approaches to meditation. Some are quite new; some have been known and practiced for thousands of years. The approach described here draws from classical Eastern systems, such as Raja Yoga, and Western psychological systems that include the transpersonal dimension, such as psychosynthesis.

It aims at expanding, elevating, and illuminating consciousness through the harmonious and integrated action of body, feelings, and the mind. It harnesses the considerable power of the mind, directing it toward higher or more profound states of consciousness. It is well-suited for many of us today as a bridging process, a mediatory means by which we can expand our awareness beyond our normal level of concrete mental activity, and reach to the world of meaning, of pure ideas and to the superconscious region, thus building a usable path between these realms, Insights that flow through this path permeate and vivify the whole of our being, and as the process continues, we become more and more in harmony, with ourselves and with all that is around us.

What is Meditation

The urge to discover more about the inner side of life is stimulating many today to a new interest in meditation. In the past this kind of "higher thinking" was considered a passive, reflective form of devotion, but meditation, as it is becoming widely practiced today, is a positive and creative use of the mind, actively linking the inner and the outer worlds. It entails concentration, reflection, a clear conception and formulation of ideas or thoughts, and then considering and visualizing ways and means of relating them to life, thus taking

into account the affective domain and physical activity. The usual contraposition of meditation on the one hand and action on the other is misleading Meditation is inner action.

The "inner action" of thought is something that we use all the time, even though we may not notice it. Thought lies at the back of everything we do: building our attitudes, our relationships and our whole way of life. In the world of the mind are born the practical beginnings of everything that man creates on earth. From the architect's thinking before he makes his blueprints, to the scientist seeking a new formula, from the world statesman to the educator, the fabric of everyday life is being woven out of thinking. In this way the future is hourly being created, thinkers are building the pattern of things to come.

Each one of us can consciously use creative thinking, and with it participate in building the inner structure of the world that is to be. For it is not only the thought of the inventors, the scientists and the nations' leaders that is bringing in the new civilization—the weight of the mass of public thought and the power of all men's aspiration are bringing into being the circumstances and the conditions that we shall have tomorrow. Each of us can play a constructive part in this if we so choose.

The mind can become a great creative instrument as well as a vital “activator.” Its vision can link us with our higher possibilities, and through it we can probe the outer boundary of our existing knowledge and catch sight of the world of meaning and values. This enables us to gather in the higher ideas of the true, the good, the needed, bringing them down to everyday recognition and making them part of life.

Creative thinking is a definite stage in objectifying ideas and higher concepts; and because thought is an energy we can use its power to develop the qualities, the attitudes, and the conditions that we think should prevail. If we use thought consciously and creatively, we can bring about changes in ourselves and our lives, as well as in our environment and in the world.

But thought often plays through us unconsciously and haphazardly, and frequently it has us instead of our having it, bringing worry and depression and sweeping us along with its own force. If we use it selfishly it can even be destructive. Therefore, at the same time as we realize the power of thought we must see the vital need for right thought, for *right* motive behind thought, and for right understanding of its subtle processes.

The Process of Meditation

Most people have only a vague idea of what meditation really is, and we need to clarify how it is accomplished, how it functions, what it achieves, and the service it can give. Thought is an energy, an unseen but real power, and through meditation we can focus it to build, to feed, to maintain an idea, a quality or a rule or law of life. As we have said, meditation is inner action—action in the inner worlds. There are many kinds of inner action; all thinking, hoping, imagining, all aspiration and desire, are activities of this type, but they are generally carried on without conscious intention and without a sense of responsibility. *Meditation, on the other hand, is conscious deliberate inner action to fulfil a specific purpose.*

We can get a good idea of the different kinds of action and their definite stages, which we propose to master in meditation—from the analogy of a missile being sent into space, pursuing its course and returning to earth. A corresponding cycle takes place in the meditation process.

The first stage is that of projection. The propelling energy of the missile conquering the downward pull of gravity projects it upwards into orbit around the earth, or beyond. In the same way we can project our centre of consciousness upwards, through the sphere of feeling and imagination, and penetrate to the world of thought and even further—to transpersonal levels. Our propelling energy is that of aspiration, which has aptly been called "fiery aspiration", and we direct it—as in fact we must direct the whole meditation process by the great unrealized potency of the will.

The second stage for the missile is its approach to the gravitational field of another centre of attraction. In meditation this corresponds to coming into contact with some higher centre of energy or life, some realm of thought, or some specific region in the inner worlds. The next stage is the delicate one of utilizing the pull from the new centre. If this is rightly achieved, the self-propelling energy still existing in the missile will enable it to circle around the new centre, keeping in orbit. The same is true of the individual consciousness in penetrating to higher, inner levels. It has to attain the region towards which it is directed, but must maintain its freedom and not become a prisoner of it. It must remain in that area only as long as is required for its purpose, that is, the experiencing and registering of whatever can be gathered from the center with which rapport is being made, or from the region of thought attained. Then we should bring the meditation to a close harmoniously and intentionally.

The essential task of receiving information from the instruments in the missile corresponds to our registering, and rightly interpreting the ideas that we find in the higher realms; and, finally, all of this has to be utilized and integrated into our existing knowledge and experience, as is the information obtained from the missile.

There is still a further point in this analogy; control of the missiles and knowledge of their position with respect to the earth is maintained throughout their whole course. So it is with meditation, conscious control should never be lost. It is possible to fall into a state of unconsciousness, but projection to this extent is wrong and dangerous. Meditation must always be a *conscious* process, we must remain fully aware the whole time, and from this point of awareness—here, where we are—direct the whole process, watching it, controlling it, and regulating its extension and duration.

Preparation

Much of the success of meditation depends upon right and careful preparation. To begin with, as quiet a place as possible should be chosen at least until we are used to meditating—where we can feel that our privacy will not be disturbed. We should sit in a comfortable position. While the Eastern way of sitting cross-legged has the advantage of keeping the spine erect, it is a difficult posture for those who are not accustomed to it, and is not necessary. An effective preliminary to meditation is to read or study something connected with the theme we will be meditating on, and if there is time we should do this as it greatly facilitates the tuning in of the mind.

Relaxation

Next, we should try to eliminate all physical, emotional, and mental tension, because such tension is a quite useless expenditure of both nervous and muscular energy. Relaxation is an art that has to be worked at, and it is not as simple as it may appear. In trying to achieve it, we are apt to fall into the opposite extreme—a state of passivity which ends in drowsiness. The aim is to eliminate all superfluous tension, while retaining the muscular tone necessary for alertness and for full attention to what we are doing.

The various techniques of relaxation cannot be described here, but there are many books which go fully into the different aspects of this subject. One of the most effective ways of achieving relaxation is through slow, rhythmic breathing.

But breathing exercises should be done with caution, for they can be harmful if carried out too strenuously. An adequate exercise consists of a deep breath with short pauses held at the end of each in-breathing and each out-breathing. This can be done about ten times, rhythmically and slowly. There should be no sense of strain, either in breathing or during the pauses, steady rhythm rather than length of time being the aim. The respiratory muscles should be relaxed with the out-breathing; this "letting go" of tension can then be diffused to all the other muscles of the body and a general relaxation achieved.

Physical relaxation is a first and necessary step to the more important one of psychological relaxation. The latter comprises emotional and mental relaxation, which have to be achieved in two distinct phases corresponding to the two different levels of the inner worlds on which we will be working—the emotional and mental. Each has to be handled separately and in its own way.

If, after relaxing physically, we begin to observe ourselves psychologically, we generally find that various feelings come and go. These emotions have to subside. It is not good to repress them forcibly, but the very fact of calmly observing them from what might be called "above", without being identified with them, causes them gradually to lose their hold and their intensity, so that they cease to sway us and quiet down—if not completely, at least to a degree in which they no longer constitute a serious obstacle; and that is good enough.

This forms the first part of psychological relaxation; the second part is mental relaxation By nature the mind is restless and in continuous activity, and this is increased by the high tempo of modern life and also by emotional stimulation. If we have managed to exclude for the moment the activities of ordinary life and have quieted the emotions, it will be less difficult to deal with the natural restlessness of the mind itself.

This cannot be done completely in the preparatory stage; it will be the chief task in the first part of the actual meditation, which is concentration. In the preparatory stage it is enough to reach a certain degree of disidentification from the mind's activity and to resist being carried by it this way and that, distinguishing this activity from the consciousness of the self, whom we could call the "Observer." This provides what might be regarded as a platform from which to go on to the actual meditation. Here, also, the aim is not to suppress by violence, or by an effort which immediately brings tension and therefore defeats its object. The method to be used is more that of attrition, of not feeding with interest any stray thoughts or images which remain in the mind; they will not then interfere seriously with the inner action of meditation. This preparation could be described as making room in and around the center of consciousness

for the exercises of concentration that are to follow, yet without attempting to clear the whole area completely at this stage.

Concentration

In taking up the subject of concentration the first point to realize is the difference between spontaneous or automatic concentration and deliberate controlled concentration. They are different, both in nature and in the way they work. What is called spontaneous concentration is the functioning of the mind under the impulse of a strong interest, desire or feeling, which keeps it working along a certain line. A typical example is the businessman as he plans for the success of his organization.

Another example is the student's concentration on the subjects on which he expects to be examined. Those who can concentrate effectively in this way are under the illusion that their power of concentration is good. And it does indicate a certain aspect of it, but the ability to keep the mind on a task or subject when driven by intense interest, need or fear, does not necessarily mean that it can be done when that incentive is lacking. The fact is that when we try to concentrate on some abstract subject, or on something which entails no personal interest or benefit, we find it much more difficult and frequently discover that we have no real control over our minds after all.

It is evidence that our emotions, drives, and thoughts play, almost dramatically, through us and are the strong forces in our lives. In other words, we are driven by them and are not ourselves the choosing, directing, controlling factor. This is one reason why the more purely mental or spiritual interests have not the driving potential of the usual personal interests of the average person. Another reason is an inherent difference in the nature of these interests. Abstract subjects are “thinner”; they are more intangible for the mind to take hold of and focus on. The mind, being less accustomed to this subtler and more difficult way of functioning, is reluctant to face it and turns away. It is a new kind of activity, and generally speaking any new subject or new area of knowledge presents difficulties to begin with. Our minds do not like starting to work in new fields; in those with which they are familiar much work has already been done; there is a background or experience and there are connections which make the work easier. A new subject requires much more concentration and effort.

The realization that we are not the masters of our minds may shock us, but if it does, that is good; it will galvanize us into making efforts towards such mastery, and will help to provide the emotional incentive which was lacking previously. Another important result of these discoveries about ourselves is awareness that

there is a difference between ourselves and our minds and emotion. The unsuccessful effort to keep the mind at work has shown that there is a conflict and conflict means that there are two factions which disagree. This awareness of conflict is valuable, therefore, in bringing to light the difference between the “I” with its own will, and the mind, which is often unruly, reluctant or lazy, and has, in a way, a life of its own.

These preliminary but vital recognitions provide a foundation for the task of learning to concentrate the mind *at will*. They bring understanding of ourselves and give the incentive we need to become masters of this precious instrument, the mind, which is so excellent a servant when dominated, but which gives such trouble when it goes its own way.

The initial technique to be used in acquiring mastery over the mind, and ability to concentrate at will is to begin with concentration on simple and neutral subjects which have no interest for us. In this way we learn to hold the mind steady without the help of personal interest and desire. There are many types of such exercises in concentration which can be practiced. Visual perception is a simple one and consequently a good one to work with first. It is a training of attention, not of thought processes, and it develops an elementary ability to focus the attention, which is the first step in the more advanced and complex processes of meditation on abstract subjects.

A simple exercise in visual perception is to observe a set of objects rapidly and accurately. For instance, observe the contents of a room for half a minute, and then write as detailed an account of them as possible. The same exercise can be done by looking in a shop window or examining a picture. Exercises in observing outward objects are a preparation for concentration on inner objects—on inner pictures or images. An exercise which provides a transition between the two is to observe a picture for twenty or thirty seconds, then close the eyes and try to keep the image of the picture in the “mind's eye” or "inner eye.” We all have this power of imagination in the sense of being able to picture objects, faces and so on, which are familiar.

It is more developed and vivid in some people than others, but for the present purpose it is not so much the vividness which is important as the power to keep the picture steady before the mind's eye, and to be able to concentrate the attention on it. Looking at the picture for a time helps considerably in getting a clear image, and therefore in the holding of it.

A second exercise of this type is to evoke an image and keep it steady for a short time without having looked at it just before. One can start with some familiar

object, such as a building that is seen every day, a view one knows, or a member of the family. The image should be built precisely, with concentration on the details, and then held steady for a certain time.

Here begins a real fight—an interesting but sometimes exasperating skirmish—between our will to keep the image steady and the fluid nature of the imagination, which is accustomed to pass from one thing to another in rapid and often disordered succession. It will play all sorts of tricks; it will distort the image, enlarge, add some alien element to it, divide it into two or more parts, substitute something else for it, in fact do anything and everything except let the picture remain quietly before the mind's eye.

This fact is again revealing. Once more we have undeniable evidence that we are not the masters of our mechanism and that there is conflict between it and ourselves. It is here that the process of self-mastery really begins in the sense of controlling, directing, and using—at will—our whole mechanism.

Apart from these specific exercises, there is ample opportunity for us to train our concentration during everyday life. It means simply giving full attention to the matter at hand without letting the mind wander. Habitual actions are frequently carried out in a more or less dreamy way, with stray thoughts about extraneous things playing through the mind. This creates a state of passive dissociation which can grow to harmful proportions, and is in any case a waste of energy. Concentration on the other hand enhances the ability to live in the present in general, and specifically in that focused section or area of the present where our immediate activity lies.

There is a higher and more important form of concentration than those types so far dealt with. It is that of the Observer or inner Spectator who, perfectly concentrated himself, observes the flowing panorama of the psychological life—called by William James the “mind stream”—and in a detached way perceives it, assesses it and, when needed, intervenes to change it. Such an inner attitude is not at all easy to maintain consistently.

Being what might be termed “on the bank” of the mind stream, we tend to be drawn into it by its currents. The attention is easily caught by some surge of emotion, by some interesting idea, by some impelling drive, and we have to draw it back continually to the centre of concentration, to the self, the awareness, the part in us which is persistent and unchanging throughout all the variations of the psychological flow. The key to acquiring the power of concentration is, as in every other skill, prolonged patience and repeated practice. Two extremes should be avoided. One is doing these apparently

uninteresting exercises in a more or less perfunctory way, as a kind of routine; this would be too superficial to serve much purpose. The other extreme to be avoided is working with them too strenuously and forcibly. Nor should we attempt to do these exercises when tired for then there is little likelihood of success, and any progress made will be at the cost of too great a strain.

Another point is that we should not be discouraged by initial lack of success, especially the inability to maintain concentration for a certain time. At first it is good enough if we can achieve real concentration for ten and then twenty seconds; a minute or two is quite long. So it is better to carry out repeated short exercises with some success than try forcibly to keep the attention fixed for a longer time.

Finally there are two helpful attitudes which, as the Observer, each of us should try to maintain through all the experiments and exercises. The first of these is patience with ourselves or, more accurately, with our mechanism—the attitude that we would adopt towards an unruly child whose cooperation we hoped to gain in the end. The other attitude is confidence that persistence will bring success. The following words of Hermann Keyserling—from his *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*—will reinforce our confidence as well as emphasize the value of what we are attempting to achieve:

Undoubtedly the power of concentration is the real propelling power of the whole of our psychic mechanism. Nothing heightens our capacity for performance as much as its increase; every success, no matter in what domain, can be traced back to the intelligent use of this power. No obstacle can resist permanently the exceptional power of utmost concentration. Attention forces every problem sooner or later to reveal all of its aspects which are capable of recognition by a specific nature.

Types of Meditation

In keeping with conventional practice, we can call *meditation* the process of sustained, controlled mental attention and activity. Under this general heading qualifying words will then define the various specific kinds, stages, and techniques. We have already dealt with the first stage of meditation—concentration. The principal types of meditation should now be looked at briefly, before we go on to deal with some of them in detail.

First there is *reflective meditation* which is a strictly mental process. It is sequential, coordinated thinking on or about a definite subject, theme, word, or thought—such as those which are called “seed thoughts”; this is an apt term

because the original or starting thought is the "seed" of all the subsequent development of the subject.

Then there is what can be called *receptive meditation* because its purpose is the reception by the mind of "light" on some subject, truth or realization. It is important to realize that *receptive* does not mean passive or negative; it indicates, instead, a state of intense alertness without any autonomous functioning. It can be compared to listening or trying to see something which is far away, or, using electronics terms, to the mind acting as a receiving station and trying to tune itself to the transmitting station. This transmitting station is primarily the Transpersonal Self; the process is called inspiration, or in some cases intuition, and the result is illumination of the mind. But the effects of such meditation are not limited to that alone, for the new and higher truths perceived have a transforming and elevating power over the whole personality; they change the whole man.

The third type is *creative meditation* which aims first at the building of a dynamic, effective, well-defined thought or idea, then at changing it with the energy of feeling, and finally at animating or propelling by will, so that it fulfills a definite function or purpose; this function may work out either in the inner worlds, or in the world of outer action by supplying a pattern or an incentive.

There is still another aspect of meditation which has been called *elevation* or *ascent.* Initially it leads to receptive meditation. Here the endeavour is to raise the centre of consciousness deliberately to ever higher levels of the inner world. It is like mounting an inner ladder towards the Transpersonal Self, and sometimes contacting it for a brief moment. When the highest point has been reached, an active interplay between the mind and the Self may take place; this has been called by Martin Buber and others the *inner dialogue.*

Reflective Meditation

The simplest definition of the first kind of meditation mentioned *reflective meditation*—is just "thinking". This is a correct definition as far as it goes, but it does not go very far, for generally we do not give much thought to thinking! We imagine that, being intelligent, we can *think* whereas just thinking about anything that interests us is in fact only an elementary state of mental activity.

It has been said that usually the mind "thinks in us", rather than that we think. This means that the activity of the mind is a process that as a rule goes on pretty much by itself promoted by stimuli or drives of different kinds and flowing in a

disorderly way, one train of thought driven out by a second, the second by a third, and so on.

To describe this state of affairs in a more exact way, we can say that normally the mind is largely independent from the "I" and from the will; it is interfered with all the time by emotions, drives, images, and external stimuli, and reacts to them. Such mental activity scarcely deserves the name of real thinking, for it is only when a strong urge or interest keeps the mind at work that it functions in an orderly and productive way.

Spontaneous—what we might call unconscious or unrealized—meditation is often practiced by people who do not give it that name. The scientist working out a problem, the philosopher thinking out a concept, the business man intelligently planning the organization of his affairs, are all examples of this, for they are all demonstrating coherent organized use of the mind—of the thinking function.

As a preliminary to true meditation, we must realize that the mind is in fact a tool, an inner tool, from which we must dis-identify ourselves in order to facilitate its proper use. The practice of concentration teaches us the first step—how to control the mind, how to keep it steady and one-pointed in the chosen direction. Now comes the next step—that of not keeping it still but making it proceed, walk, so to speak, along the way we want it to go, towards some chosen goal.

Thinking in this sense means reflecting or brooding upon a given, well-defined subject, and working out all the implications, ramifications, and meanings implicit in it. And meditation can be said to be an unbroken flow of thought toward the object of concentration.

The first requirement, then for developing the art of thinking is to give close attention to the actual *process* of thinking, for example, to notice immediately when its course begins to deviate as a result of either emotional reaction or preconceived mental attitude, or—as is frequently the case—in response to the process of mechanical association, which carries the mind through a series of allied subjects to a point far from the starting place.

The second requirement is *persistence*—thinking *through*. Here some rather curious things happen. At first, after a few minutes of reflective thinking, it may seem that the subject has been exhausted, that there is nothing left to think about. But if we persist through this blank period and continue to reflect, we begin to discover other unrealized aspects; we may even find what appeared at

first to be a dearth of content is, in fact, an overabundance—what the French call an "embarras de richesses," Then a new difficulty appears—how to explore all the now perceived aspects and complexities of the subject, and how to deal with the inrush of new thought-trains.

Innumerable subjects are suitable for reflective meditation, and mention can be made here only of the different categories. Psychological and spiritual qualities offer an almost endless series—courage, harmony, serenity, joy, will, and so on. Symbols constitute another type.

One can also meditate on a phrase embodying a thought. Such "seed thoughts" are, of course, also innumerable, but they can be divided broadly into two classes; first those that appear simple and obvious, but which turn out to conceal a world of meaning; second, those that are formulated in a paradoxical and therefore challenging way. These are often in the form of an apparent contradiction, the reconciliation of which lies in a higher or more comprehensive synthesis of the two opposite terms, for instance—

"Act with interest and without interest."
"Suffer with joy" (Which does not mean to enjoy suffering)
"Make haste slowly." (An old Latin saying, "festina lente.")
"Live in the eternal and in the moment."
"See action in inaction and inaction in action"

Technical Suggestions on Reflective Meditation

The first suggestion is never to concentrate on negative aspects but to direct the attention to those that are positive. The second is to write down immediately any worthwhile thoughts or conclusions arrived at. Concepts that seem clear and vivid at the time have a way of disappearing from the consciousness very quickly and are lost—at least temporarily—if not fixed right away. The formulation of thoughts verbally also forces us to clarity of thinking and precision, and exposes any confusion and vagueness in our minds. The process of writing is itself a stimulus to meditation, and may lead to further valuable thoughts, "flowing from the pen," so to speak.

Writing in this sense is a meditation technique; it definitely helps in keeping the mind oriented and active along the desired lines and in maintaining its focus. The length of time to be spent on meditation varies, but to begin with it should not exceed ten or fifteen minutes; that is quite long enough. The length of period during which one subject should be used as the theme also varies, but it should

not be less than a week, and after some practice one often finds a month none too long.

In fact some subjects appear to be virtually inexhaustible. A good method is to meditate on certain themes cyclically, that is, a series of subjects may be listed and each one be used in turn for a week, after which the series is gone through again.

At this point the time factor should be mentioned. This is a problem that everyone comes up against. Nearly all feel that they have so much to do, their lives are so complicated, there is so little privacy today and the demands of work and family leave so little spare time or energy, that, although they realize the value of a time of meditation each day, they feel that they cannot undertake it. These difficulties are real. The whole organization and machinery of modern living take no account at all of the rights of the inner life, and so the whole trend at present is against it. But in spite of these formidable problems, if we feel the value of the inner life strongly enough and really intend to give it some time, we can usually find a way of making room in the day for at least a short meditation. Ten or fifteen minutes is not a long period to fit into a twenty-four hour program. It is plain, however, that it is almost impossible to have ideal conditions for this in modern life, and any quiet time that we find in the day is an oasis to be taken advantage of. A good rhythm to establish is that of meditating in the same place first thing every morning, before entering into the melee of the day. Regularity is most valuable, but we should not be dependent upon such rhythm and, even if it takes longer to attune ourselves to the inner work and is more difficult, it is better to learn to do this quite independently of our surroundings.

Each one of us has his own problems on this and each has to solve them as best he can. The rewards of reflective meditation are many. First it brings increasing proficiency in using the mental tool and a growing sense of mastery of the mind. This, of course, is reached only by degrees, and We cannot expect to achieve perfection; but even a fair degree of control of the mind is gratifying and most valuable, for the mind is a bad master, but a most useful servant. Other results will emerge if we seriously undertake and continue this form of inner action, which is also a necessary preliminary step to the other types of meditation. It begins our training in this field of work and lays the foundations for all future achievement.

Receptive Meditation

Receptive meditation is a most valuable part of our mental training, but, although it may seem quite simple, it is actually the most difficult kind of meditation and one in which we are quite likely to commit mistakes. There are also real dangers attached to it and we might, therefore, feel inclined to leave it alone. Indeed, it is not advisable for everyone, but there are good reasons for training ourselves in it and adopting it as a regular part of our inner action, and so its right and safe use will be explained.

First of all we should realize how invaluable receptive meditation is and how helpful is the insight it can bring, both in our spiritual realizations and in guiding our personal lives. Second, increased sensitivity, or receptivity to "impressions" is a natural and spontaneous result of inner harmonization, and of relationship or contact with the Transpersonal Self. Third, if rightly practiced it is not only without dangers, but is of great help in avoiding the dangers of *unconscious* receptivity. This point is so important and of such constant application that it will be good to deal with it at some length.

We should start with a clear recognition that we are exposed to countless individual, group, and mass influences all the time. These last take the form of waves of excitement, of panic, or of hostility which sweep through humanity, or large sections of it, and sway or even engulf those who do not know how to deal with them. These waves or impacts, increasingly recognized today under the general term of "vibrations", may reach us through the normal channels of the senses, telepathically through psychic impressions, or from mental levels.

It is most useful—although it may shock us—to realize how much we are tools or victims of influences of which we are unconscious, or to which we yield in a passive way. An outstanding example—which can be regarded as a gigantic experiment in mass suggestion and in influencing behavior is advertising, the effectiveness of which can be evaluated in billions of dollars. At first it was used more or less empirically, although with unconscious psychological skill; but today it is being used quite deliberately, consciously utilizing definite psychological techniques.

It might seem, therefore, that we should try to become non-receptive to outer influences, but this is not the true solution. It is practically impossible to be non-receptive and it is also undesirable. We do not live in isolation; we are intimately connected and interacting with both individuals and groups. Isolation would mean self-centeredness, and this is such an unnatural condition that it often proves painful and even unbearable. The anguish of solitude produced by

isolation has been described vividly by several existentialist writers, such as Kirkegaard and Kafka.

Human relations imply receptivity, and lack of receptivity excludes love. The true solution requires clear thought and skill in action, and is arrived at through three stages of inner activity—awareness, control of mastery, and wise utilization. These functions of receptive meditation offer the best way to turn the liabilities, the mistakes, and the dangers of receptivity into assets. It is well to realize and remember that receptive meditation is a definite form of *meditation*—it is a *conscious and controlled mental activity*. It is quite different from merely psychic receptivity which opens us to influences of an emotional and imaginative character, and its mental quality enables us to discriminate between the various kinds of impression, to register them correctly
and later to interpret them rightly. These points will be developed further when describing the techniques of receptive meditation.

Stages of Receptive Meditation

As the first condition of safe receptive meditation is the ability to keep our consciousness steadily on the mental level of awareness, it should be done only after the preparation described as necessary for reflective meditation. That means we must go through the stages of relaxation, mental preparation by means of appropriate reading, dis-identification of the self from the body and the emotional life, the elevation of the centre of consciousness and the achievement of the inner attitude of the Observer. This is a condition of positive, wide-awake awareness. It is also advisable at this point to make whenever possible a short reflective meditation; this will consolidate the positive inner attitude and develop the ability to use the mind as an obedient tool.

To realize the difference between reflective and receptive meditation it is useful to consider the mind as an “inner eye”, which in a certain respect it truly is. In reflective meditation the eye of the mind is directed, figuratively speaking, horizontally, trying to see beyond the apparent, or rightly interpret what has entered the field of consciousness. On the other hand, in receptive meditation we direct the mind's eye “upwards” and try to discern what is “above”, on a higher level than that on which we are aware. This can also be described in terms of hearing—we try to catch some inner sound or message coming from a higher or subtler region.

Silence

This stage should be defined carefully, because there are various kinds of silence. The safe and true kind needed is a *positive* silence, that is, the maintaining of an alert inner stillness for the desired period, in which we eliminate as much as possible all the spontaneous activity of the mind. This phase of silence is a necessary condition for receiving and registering higher influences. Someone endeavouring to reach this inner silence once wrote of it in the following amusing way: "I was in deep meditation and knew I had reached a very clear and lucid place and like a flash came the thought: I know that I am in a very, real inner place and yet I am deaf and blind, seeing and hearing nothing. Another split second and there came a sort of humouring response: If you were also dumb you might possibly see and hear".

To achieve and maintain the inner silence is a difficult task which calls for persistence and a firm determination; it is a sustained act of the will. Our psychological mechanism is not accustomed to such discipline, it resents it and tries in every way to shake it off. A flood of impressions, sensations, emotions, images, and thoughts invades the field of consciousness and a fierce fight for mastery begins. It seems we will never succeed in expelling the intruders, which appear to come from every side at once. But it is not necessary to be drastic; too strenuous an effort is undesirable and defeats its own ends. There are several techniques we can use; one is to repeat over and over a phrase or word; another is to evoke an image and keep it clear and steady at the center of the consciousness. The best words and images for this purpose are those which suggest a state of calm, of peace, or silence. An effective phrase for example (from a Hymn used in the Greek Mysteries) is: "Be silent, O strings, that a new melody may come to me." Images such as the following are helpful in stilling the mind: a quiet lake reflecting the blue of the sky; a majestic mountain peak; the starry sky in the stillness of the night.

Those who have already had some training or practice in meditation will be able to use the technique of watching the flow of the mental stream in a detached, dispassionate way, as something objective and not belonging to oneself. If we succeed in maintaining this positive watching attitude long enough the stream of emotions and thoughts becomes slower and slower until it becomes still.

An opposite condition, that of drowsiness sometimes occurs. This is to be firmly avoided because it is not conducive to the receiving of higher impressions and, instead, it may bring about a condition which is undesirable and even dangerous. The achievement of a true inner silence is well worth the effort and the persistent training which it takes. Besides being necessary for receptive

meditation it has a value of its own; it is conducive to a condition of harmony, peace, and quiet joy, and it produces a sense of expansion of consciousness; it is also essentially restful and refreshing.

Methods of Reception

When a state of silence has been reached, that is, after a period of effort and struggle to achieve silence, then we are ready for the further stage of reception. The inner attitude is one of quiet watchfulness and patient waiting; it can also be described as a state of keen but unemotional interest in what may happen and of what we may become aware. The source from which we await impression, and to which therefore we direct our one-pointed attention, should be the Transpersonal Self. That is the sure source of true impression. But it is not the only source; impressions from other sources, if these are high and true, are often channelled or conveyed through the Self to the conscious mind.

Inner Seeing

The methods of reception are various; an impression may reveal itself to our consciousness through *seeing, hearing, contact, urge to action* and in other ways. The most frequent is perhaps through seeing or illumination. The mind is indeed symbolically an inner eye, and the symbolism of vision is often used. We speak of insight, of illumination, of "seeing" in the sense of realizing the meaning or significance of some fact or event, and we talk of "seeing" the solution of a problem and of having a "bright" idea, Sometimes an abstract geometrical figure or some other symbolic form enters into the field of consciousness However, a series of concrete images and forms and colors may also appear, but these are the product of the imagination and are not mental in character. During receptive meditation this latter type of image should not be paid attention to or at the most can be observed quietly for a short time without undue interest.

A higher form of spiritual "seeing" can be called intuition This word may be misleading because it has been used in different senses. Etymologically it is connected with vision, it means "seeing into." Intuition in its higher and purer sense can be considered to be a direct, suprarational understanding or comprehension of the true nature and reality of something—comprehension of its true quality, purpose, and essence. It is quite different from what are called "hunches," which are psychic impressions about people or events of a personal character and having personal interest.

Inner Hearing

The second way of receiving impressions is that of inner hearing. Here, too, we must discriminate carefully between the psychic hearing of voices and the much higher inner spiritual hearing. This discrimination is not easy and calls for a subtler sense than that needed for discriminating between images and true spiritual insight.

The difference can be termed one of *quality* and *level.* After some practice in receptivity one becomes more and more aware of the level on which the consciousness functions. If it functions on the emotional and imaginative levels the voices heard are apt to give messages or impressions of a personal character, highly coloured with feeling of some kind. Inspiration coming from high levels, on the other hand, is generally impersonal in character. The messages are short, incisive, and meaningful. They are generally concerned with one's spiritual advancement and will contain wise advice, perhaps pointing out some fault to be eliminated, some spiritual quality to be developed or some high aim to be attained. Sometimes the message is symbolic in character, even though the phrase may appear to have a concrete meanings. Such was the case with the well-known message received by St. Francis—"Go, and restore my church." He interpreted it at first as an injunction to build up a half-ruined little church, but later he recognized that it was a command to restore the Roman Church of his time. To this kind of impression belong also many artistic, literary, and musical inspirations. The poet or musician has the impression that something in himself or somebody else dictates them; he seems to "hear" inwardly, and the poem or idea or theme appears spontaneously in his field of consciousness. The symbol of the Muse inspiring or speaking to the attentive ear of the poet has expressed this through the ages.

Sometimes a *dialogue* is established between the conscious personality and the Self; a question put by the meditating mind receives a prompt and clear inner answer which seems to formulate itself and appear to the consciousness. If the personality comments on it and replies, a further reaction is then registered. This dialogue has been dealt with in its more general sense by Martin Buber in several of his books, and he applies it to all kinds of spiritual relationships. This dialogue can be facilitated through the use of one of the symbols of the Self—that of the Old Wise Man.

Inner Contact

The third form of receptivity can be called *contact,* because it is analogous to the physical sense of touch or feeling by contact. But this expression should not be

taken too literally; it corresponds to our meaning. When we say we "contact somebody," or are "in touch with someone." It does not mean that we touch the person physically, but indicates a relationship, a rapport, an easy interplay at will. The same can be said of *inner* contact, alluding specifically to the Self. It means an easy rapport or alignment with the Self which permits receptivity to its influence and awareness of its quality and nature, and gradually enables us to identify or unify ourselves in consciousness with it, however partially and momentarily.

By this inner nearness, by this "touch" of the Self, we are harmonized, vivified, recharged with energy, or with that which we specifically need at the time, and which the Self is trying to convey to us Its effects are clarifying, and enlightening; we are filled with certainty, courage, joy; we feel renewed and ready to go back to the arena of personal life and meet its emergencies and challenges. We feel that some higher power has descended upon us and added a certain degree of blending or infusion by the Self of the radiation from superconscious levels.

Urge to Action

The fourth way in which we may receive impression from the Self is through an *urge to action*. We become aware of it as a definite urge to do something, to undertake a task or duty in some field of service, or sometimes it may be an urge toward inner action of some sort, to the changing of something in ourselves. This type of impression is what the Quakers who have practiced extensively this art of receptive meditation and silence, call "concern."

Again we need to discriminate carefully between urges coming from the Self or some high, superconscious level, and those coming from the middle or lower unconscious. The way in which they appear in the consciousness is similar, but a difference will be found in the quality and content of the urge. Whenever it takes the form of a call to a great mission or to some action of personal advantage we should regard it with suspicion. An urge of this type is normally of lower origin and is spurious and should be dismissed.

Registration

After reception comes the stage of registration. Every impression whatever its type or the way in which it is received, should be accurately and immediately registered in writing. As mentioned previously in connection with reflective meditation, the higher impressions are often vivid and clear at the moment of reception, but they have a curious tendency to disappear rapidly from the field of

consciousness and if not caught and registered at once they are apt to be lost. Also, the very fact of formulating them and writing them down helps us to understand them better; sometimes during writing the impression will develop, and we will continue to receive it. Writing can, in fact, be used as a technique for evoking inspiration; it creates a convenient channel for the higher impressions. But while writing one should always remain alert and fully aware, not permitting any form of "automatic" writing, which can easily have undesirable and even dangerous effects.

Delayed Reception

Another interesting aspect of receptivity is the *delayed reception of impression* It often seems that nothing happens during receptive meditation; we remain in a state of blankness and do not become aware of anything new except, perhaps, a sense of quiet, rest, and refreshment. But this does not necessarily mean the meditation has been useless and unsuccessful, for quite frequently some impression or inspiration will come into our consciousness later in the day or even another day. It may be in another meditation or at some time when we are engaged in quite different activities; it may be in some moment of relaxation or on waking in the morning, but whenever it is we will recognize a connection between the apparently unsuccessful meditation and the subsequent inspiration. This connection will be evident when the answer which we sought to some question or problem flashes into our minds, but there can also be a less dramatic but equally true delayed reception of impression to which we should be alert.

Therefore, after meditation we should always keep an inner attitude of watchfulness and attentiveness—what is called, when developed, a "meditative attitude"—during the whole day. We can train ourselves to develop a state of dual consciousness, that is being normally concentrated on our outer activity while at the same time keeping a part of our attention turned toward the inner world. This is the "attitude of the Observer", watching what happens both in the outer world and on the various inner levels of life.

Dangers and Mistakes of Receptive Meditation

There are several possible dangers which are real and therefore should be understood and carefully offset. The two main dangers are negativity or passivity on the one hand and over stimulation or excitation on the other. A state of passivity allows the intrusion into the fields of consciousness of forces or elements coming from the unconscious, including its lower levels. They are not always recognized, but even when they are it may be difficult to offset their influence and resist their onrush. The difficulty is even greater when they delude

us by an alluring appearance; they may seem harmless or even of a high order, yet not only are they without real value, but they can be entirely misleading.

The consciousness can also be invaded by influences from sources outside the *individual* unconscious. Using a general expression, we can say that they come from the collective unconscious; this term may include general psychic currents, general symbols and forms (called by Jung "archetypes"), and specific group centers of influence. This field is extensive and as yet relatively little known and we cannot enter here into further discussion of the subject. It is enough for our present purpose to point out the reality of the danger.

The chief safeguard against this danger is a constant positive watchfulness, as has been said already. Another safeguard is the striving to make a clear distinction between spiritual impressions and the multifarious psychic influences of a lower kind. Psychic phenomena have no inherent value toward spiritual or even personal development, and undue interest in them can become a definite sidetrack to our growth. It is wise to remember that primitive people and even animals have psychic faculties. Scientific investigation of such phenomena on the other hand has its definite place, but that is quite a different matter and it requires different methods from those used in receptive meditation.

The other danger which must be guarded against is *over stimulation.* This is independent of both the nature and the source of the impressions received, for even a high spiritual influence, if it rushes into the personality with full force, can cause undesirable effects in some cases; effects which range from nervous tension and exhaustion to emotional excitement, fanaticism, excessive and feverish activity, or manifestations of uncontrolled psychic phenomena. But undesirable consequences can be prevented by wisely regulating the practice of meditation or by suspending it for a time when there are indications of trouble.

The reality of the dangers certainly calls for caution but should not arouse fear or discourage the practice of meditation. Everything effective can be a source of danger; even the most beneficial medicine can be harmful if taken in excessive doses. And to use another analogy, both inner ascensions and mountain climbing can be dangerous, but with proper preparation, caution, and skill in action the dangers are minimized—and in the case of meditation the benefits far outweigh the risks. It should be repeated that receptive meditation rightly carried out—that is, with constant, positive watchfulness—and followed by discriminating and wise interpretation of the results, can protect effectively from influences and suggestions coming from either the outer or the inner worlds which may not have been previously recognized or satisfactorily dealt with. Meditation focuses the consciousness on the mental level, from which it can on the one hand

exercise an intelligent guidance over the realm of emotion, imagination, and psychic phenomena, and on the other receive light, inspiration, and power from above, from your Higher Self within your brain.

Outline Example for a Creative Meditation

STAGE I ALIGNMENT

This alignment/preparation has a definite PURPOSE, which it can be wise to bear in mind. Its purpose is to bring stillness to your etheric body, calm poise to your emotional nature, plus mental clarity and receptivity to soul impression.

Preparation and Alignment

1. Relax physically, steadying your breathing, and gradually drawing in to a point of central quiet stillness.
2. Raise your consciousness upwards through the emotional and mental 'fields' towards the Higher Self Within.
3. Identify your personality consciousness with your Higher Self Consciousness (as far as you are able to) and realize that they are, in reality, two aspects of one Self.

STAGE II DEDICATION

Focus on the purpose of your meditation. Say a Dedication such as this one - or use other words if you prefer to – to polarize yourself within the soul work that you and your soul group seek to accomplish on Earth.

"We dedicate ourselves to the service of Humanity and will do all we can to prepare men's minds and hearts to World Peace. With this intention we meditate on the Laws and Principles of Goodwill, and will co-operate in every way we can with their implementation in the world."

STAGE III APPROACH AND CONTACT

Many people have also found it helpful and centring to repeat silently the following words "I stand and Wait", endeavouring to realise their deep meaning.

"Keep close in touch with the "Higher Self Within"(the Power Within)
Who surveys your life.
With Us (the Higher Self Within) are found the forces of the living Light and Love which you must use.
Keep close to Us (the Higher Self Within), and day by day draw on that strength
And knowledge which We have and which is also yours.
Let naught disturb the acquiescent calm which keeps you close in touch,
Which brings you light and understanding
And which keeps you steadfast on the Way."

STAGE IV CREATIVE MEDITATION

1. **Attunement:** Polarized now, as high as you can in consciousness, align your thinking with **THE THEME** you have chosen for this meditation or meditation cycle (whether that be a Higher Self Quality, a Law, a Principle, a Question, an Astrological Sign, or a Seed thought, word, or phrase). Mentally salute it and seek to *become attuned to its livingness, to the vibration of its Source.*

2. **Reflective Meditation:** Ponder as deeply as possible *(i) its appearance or many forms, (ii) its quality or meaning, and (iii) its deepest essence, purpose and potential.*

   Relate it to the present world opportunity, *seeing the need for it, its potential practical usefulness, its spiritual value or desirability for humanity as a whole.*

   Holding the mind steady in the light of the Higher Self Within (you), write down any thought, images, or insights that enter your waiting mind in connection with it. Explore it mentally at first (you may like to make a 'mind-map' on paper if that is a method you find helpful). You might also consider its emotional impact and practical applications.

3. **Contemplation:** When it seems right to move on, or in accordance with the time-frame you have for this meditation, still your mind again and become open to "Higher Self Within" impression about the theme, endeavouring to 'see' the theme more and more as the Higher Self Within sees it.

4. **Registration:** Now *formulate* a synthesis of what you have accomplished so far, in a way that you might be able to apply in your own life and/or in a way it could be usefully presented to others. Writing this

down can help you to literally 'embody' this quality or subtle energy pattern.

5. **Radiation:** Using your creative imagination, now *"breathe out"* the energy and idea of the Quality, Law, Principle, Sign, or Theme for the current period as a formulated, living thought-form of lighted substance, into the stream of mental substance which is ever playing upon human consciousness.

6. **Closure:** Close either with an intentional affirmation, or, a "Will statement." For example:

   "May the down-pouring energy of ... (eg. The Law of Right Human Relations, if that were the theme you had been working with…) be anchored on earth, and may it pervade our minds and hearts and actions."

   Or:

   "I will to cultivate and express unconditional love and forgiveness today in my daily life"

7. As fits your situation, say softly, aloud, or silently, a Powerful Invocation or any other "Words of Power", intent upon radiating the psychic energies you have been seeking to contact, in service to humanity.

Ending with Hindu Sacred Words:

AUM AUM AUM

Traditionally, it radiates Wisdom (Light), Love and Power of the Will-to-Good of the Higher Self Within (Soul), with the same intention.

This meditation normally needs about 15 - 20 minutes, but the time given to each stage can be varied.

Remember that a short, dynamic meditation can be more positive and creative than one that is longer and less defined. You may like to use many themes, and also, other mantram or dedications. These have been quoted as examples. Above outline is purely to offer you ideas for a basic structure that many people have found over the years works well for them.

Be prepared for the unexpected. The 'answers' to your need do not always come at the time or in the manner you always expect, or even would like. Intend to generate beneficial results, but do not always pull up the plant by the roots to see how it is progressing! There is value in 'plodding' – gentle, steady, persistence is the most valuable quality to develop.

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